University of Alberta

Women in Elite Disability Sport: Multidimensional Perspectives

by

Lisa Marie Olenik ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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When I do not see plurality stressed in the very structure of a theory, I know that I will have to do lots of acrobatics - of the contortionist and the walk-on-tightrope kind - to have this theory speak to me without allowing the theory to distort me in my complexity.

Maria Lugones

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Women in Disability Sport: Multidimensional Perspectives submitted by Lisa Marie Olenik in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

There is a marked under-representation of women participating at both the athletic and administrative levels of disability sport. Feminist discussion in this area has assumed that this lack of women in elite disability sport is because of restrictive power structures and systemic barriers to participation. This research examined the multitude of perceptions that women hold while involved in disability sport as athletes, administrators, and active participants. This research comprised four separate studies which were distinguished by the diverse theoretical assumptions upon which they were based. The first study used grounded theory to select themes for further inquiry, while the second provided a critical lens upon which to base policy recommendations. Relativism and the context of knowledge production in the world of disability sport were highlighted in the last two studies. Qualitative data were collected using in-depth interviews and descriptive statistics were reported. The research was limited to athletes and administrators from North America and Western Europe. Research participants included five males and five females in the first study, 5 Winter Paralympic female athletes in the second study, 20 Summer Paralympic female athletes in the third study, and 20 female administrators in the fourth study. Specifically, research participants were asked about their initiation into disability sport, their sustainment as participants, and finally what might deter or disallow their continued involvement. Important findings were discussed in each study, and were summarized in the final chapter. The most substantive issues revealed within and among the four studies were distilled into the following: 1. The knowledge generated by the institution of elite disability sport was reproducing socially constructed definitions of the athlete with a disability as different. Disability itself was a barrier to be overcome through sport, rather than being integrated into the athlete and her athleticism. 2. Female athletes were not socialized into elite disability sport via the disability sport organizations, physical education, or youth sport, unlike the able-bodied population. 3. Normalization theory or norming the non-standard in disability sport was being applied as a source of legitimation for elite disability sport. 4. Disability sport by its definition and organization has privileged the disability rather than the sport and restricted the female athlete from expressing her athleticism. 5. The female athletes were operating with a different understanding of competitive opportunity than were the sport organizations. Specifically, disability sport administrators believed they were facilitating access to sport, while the female athletes' experience was constrained by a lack of competitive opportunities. 6. The female athlete did not feel she was heard by sport organizers, nor did she feel she had access to the power structures which govern disability sport. 7. Female athletes and female administrators shared a "love of sport" for its intrinsic value and not its rehabilitative value. 8. Elite sport participation actively deterred the female athlete with a disability form participating by not allowing her the power to shape the forces that shape her. These findings challenge the assumptions and "common sense" notions that have prevailed in disability sport since its inception. It was determined that these assumptions were socially constructed, sustained, and reinforced through use of theory and practice and were not grounded in the "athlete" or athletic behavior.

(Key Words: athlete, female, disability, sport, administrator, feminist)

Dedication

To the women in my life. To the teachers, students, colleagues, grandmothers, aunts, cousins and friends. To my mother - for maintaining our center of the world. To my sister - for willing me safe and conspiring against all interlopers. To the athletes - for giving us all a hope.

Acknowledgement

The preparation of this thesis has been a multi-dimensional task. I would not have been able to complete the research without the able support of many people and institutions. I would like to acknowledge and express my appreciation for some of them.

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And finally, I want to thank Mr. Edward L. Olenik who taught me to throw hard, knowing that eventually I would hit the target.

He who stands on tiptoe
doesn't stand firm.
He who rushes ahead
doesn't go far.
He who tries to shine
dims his own light.
He who defines himself
can't really know who he really is.
He who has power over others
can't empower himself.
He who clings to his work
will create nothing that endures.

If you want to accord with the Tao,
just do your job, then let go.

Tao Te Ching

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Most research examining the benefit of sport for people with a disability report physiological and psychological gains for those who take part (Cowell, Squires, & Raven, 1986; Jackson & Davis, 1983; Shephard, 1991; Valliant, Bezzubyk, Daley, & Asu, 1985). Although many studies acknowledge the social benefits available to people with a disability who participate in sport, relatively few studies have examined the mechanisms behind those social gains. Several studies relative to the sociological aspects of participation by the athlete with a disability have provided descriptive information about the athlete (Brandmeyer & McBee, 1985; Cooper, Sherrill, & Marshall, 1986; Hopper, 1984; Sherrill, Rainbolt, Montelione, & Pope, 1986). These initial studies acknowledged a relationship between the categories "athlete" and "disability," without considering the implications of gender, race, ethnicity, disability type, or socioeconomic status. Of the studies that do include gender in their analysis, only a few acknowledge the complex context of sport or the relationship to physical activity (Watkinson & Calzonetti, 1989; Sherrill, Silliman, Gench, & Hinson, 1990; Sherrill, Gench, Hinson, Gilstrap, Richir, & Mastro, 1990; Kolkka & Williams, 1997). Building on this line of inquiry has been research from the field of therapeutic recreation which explored the experiences and meanings of physical activity for women with disabilities (Henderson & Bedini, 1995). In this study, in-depth qualitative interviews were used to determine how women with mobility impairments experienced physical activity and leisure. Although the study was outside of the sport context, some of the findings are relevant to this thesis and are discussed further in Chapter 2. Finally, there has been a concerted effort by adapted physical activity professionals to promote research that acknowledges the multi-dimensionality of the athlete with a disability and thus expand the research agenda (Sherrill, 1997; Williams, 1994a; 1994b; Sherrill, 1993; Williams & Olenik, in press; DePauw, 1994). According to Sherrill (1997),

> Disability is a multidimensional identity that is specific to culture and history, is socially constructed, and is mediated by time of onset, nature of impairment, socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, and the multitude of roles, expectancies, aspirations, and perceptions that each individual incorporates into the self. (p. 257)

Because of the magnitude of a research agenda that encompasses all aspects of being both a woman and a disability sport participant, I found it necessary to limit my focus to one context, that being North American disability sport for elite female athletes in the late 1990s.

Presently, there is a marked under-representation of women participating in both the athletic and administrative levels of disability sport (DePauw & Gavron, 1995; Olenik, Matthews, & Steadward, 1995). I see this phenomenon as problematic. Feminist discussion in this area assumes that this dearth of women in elite disability sport is because of restrictive power structures and systemic barriers which keep women from participating. Logically, one might think that to test this assumption would require information from non-participants, which would entail identifying women who want to, but have not participated. This research examines the perspective of women who engage in disability sport. It is the general intent and purpose of the following four studies to examine the multitude of perceptions that women with disabilities hold while involved in the construction of sport as athletes, administrators, and active participants. Each study within the project includes a specific purpose statement relative to the theoretical nature of the inquiry. After discussing the perceptions and issues these women hold, recommendations for policy formulation and decision making are presented.

Paper Format (Project Evolution)

This dissertation is comprised of four separate studies related to the female athlete with a disability; her perceptions, participatory issues, and level of representation. Using the results of the first study, a questionnaire framework was developed to address three basic thematic areas: what **initiates** these women into sport; what **sustains** them in their journey; and what influences them to leave or **deters** them from participating. The following four questions were adapted from Rosecrance (1985) and used to gather information related to the above themes:

1. What are the characteristics of the informants?
2. What are the characteristics of the social world in which they operate?
3. What are the coping mechanisms they use to sustain participation?
4. How do the informants feel about what they are doing; how do they define themselves? (p. 23)

The first study, entitled Gender Issues in Perception of Disability in Relation to Sport and Physical Activity, is reported in Chapter 2. This project examines the participatory issues of men and women with a disability within the context of physical activity. Perspectives from both male and female athletes are necessary to ascertain if participatory issues are grounded in gender. This study, based on theoretically grounded data, served as the baseline for the next three studies, and familiarized the researcher with argot and descriptors commonly used by informants in this context.

The second study, Women, Disability and Sport: Unheard Voices, was published prior to the completion of the final two studies and further documents participatory issues of the female athlete with a disability. This study assumes an inherent usefulness in the structure of the elite disability sport movement and examines the role of the elite female athlete within that institution. This study illuminated the issues and experiences of the female athlete, and revealed her view of the disability sport system and the context within which she participates.

The third study, Elite Disability Sport and the Female Athlete, covered in Chapter 4, further examines the experiences and perceptions of the elite level female athlete competing in disability sport. More specific in nature, this study examines what initiates and sustains the elite female athlete in her choice to compete, and what would deter her from future participation.

The final study, Women and Disability Sport: Perceptions and Approaches of Women Working in the Paralympic Movement comprises Chapter 5. This study seeks to understand the informants' perspective as it relates to the administration and organization of elite disability sport, by gathering data on what initiates, sustains, and characterizes the women working in this field. This study also provides data which is compared with the information from the athletes in the third study.

Historical Context

Before discussing the theoretical development of the papers, it is necessary to examine the historical framework and socio-geographic context of the Paralympic Movement. The following is a synopsis of the time frame and competitive history of the Paralympic Games.

Paralympic History

Elite disability sport today is largely identified with the Paralympic Movement, specifically the Paralympic Games and is grounded in Western culture. Although little documented evidence exists on organized disability sporting events before 1924, historical accounts confirm the participation of people with disabilities in physical activity and movement exercise in China dating back to 2700 BCE (DePauw & Gavron, 1995).

The first modern formally organized disability sport games were held in 1924 when the Comité International des Sports des Sourds (CISS) was formed. That same year, the first World Games for the Deaf were held in Paris, France. Twenty years later, in 1945, war veterans in the United States began to compete in wheelchair basketball at the Corona Naval Station in California (DePauw & Gavron, 1995). In 1948 Sir Ludwig Guttmann of Stoke Mandeville Rehabilitation Hospitals organized the first competitive wheelchair games for men and women with spinal cord injuries in Aylesbury, England. At these Games, 26 British male war veterans and 3 women competed in archery. In 1952, the annual Stoke Mandeville Games attained international status when a team from

The Netherlands crossed the English Channel to compete against the British team. Initially, these Games had been organized as an alternative to traditional medical intervention during rehabilitation of people with spinal cord injury (Guttmann, 1976). Dr. Guttmann, a neurologist and neurosurgeon, set up the Spinal Injuries Centre at the request of the British Government to address the physical and health needs of paralysed veterans. This success with sport intervention inspired him to expand his vision of the Stoke Mandeville Games which later became the Paralympic Games.

Eight years later, 400 wheelchair athletes from 23 countries, gathered in Rome to compete in the first Paralympic Games following the 1960 Summer Olympic Games. Dr. Guttmann was the architect of these first Games and was influential in the development of additional international sport organizations which continue to facilitate and foster sports for athletes with disabilities. The 1996 Atlanta Summer Paralympic Games provided competitive opportunities for over 3,100 athletes from 104 nations in 33 events, even though total participation numbers were less than expected and lower than the previous Paralympics in Barcelona (Sherrill, 1997).

Since 1960, the Paralympic Games have occurred two weeks after the Olympic Games in the same city and in the same venues. Recently, the 1998 Winter Paralympics were held in Nagano, Japan, and preparations are now underway for the 2000 Summer Paralympics in Sydney, Australia, the 2002 Winter Paralympics in Salt Lake City, USA, and the 2004 Summer Paralympic Games in Athens, Greece.

Unfortunately, except for general participation numbers, reliable statistical information on gender, disability type, age, and sport affiliation is unavailable for Games prior to the 1994 Lillehammer Winter Paralympics. However, Paralympic Games organizers estimate that women now make up 25 to 30% of participants. In Lillehammer, of 625 competitors from 31 countries, 481 were male and 144 female (International Paralympic Committee, 1994). In Atlanta, the gender ratio was approximately 4 males to 1 female. Of the 104 participating countries, 49 had no female representation (Sherrill, 1997).

Today, sport for athletes with a disability at the international level is the responsibility of, and is sanctioned, supervised and coordinated by the IPC. The IPC is the organizational equivalent of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), except that it is a fully democratic organization with national representation, including more than 150 member nations, athlete representation and representation from the five international sport organizations. Unlike Olympic sport which is organized around specific sporting events, these Paralympic organizations are organized according to disability type. They are: Cerebral Palsy-International Sport & Recreation Association (CP-ISRA), International Blind Sport Association (IBSA), International Sport Organization for the Disabled (ISOD), International Stoke Mandeville Wheelchair Sport Federation (ISMWSF), and the International Association of Sport For the Mentally Handicapped (INAS-FMH).

A historical time-line in Appendix A provides a more extensive analysis of the development of the Paralympic Movement. Included in this section is a time-line of the Paralympic Games, the formation dates of international organizations, and examples of sport demonstration events where athletes with disabilities participated in able-bodied competition, including World Championships and the Olympics.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

What distinguishes these four studies is the diverse theoretical assumptions upon which they are based. The goal of the first study (Chapter 2) is to use grounded theory to select themes deserving further academic inquiry. Although grounded theory is positivist in nature, the first study was not the "pilot" for the following three studies, nor was the intent of the following three studies to prove or disprove the validity of the first study. As I continued my inquiry into the world of the female athlete with a disability, my perspective and therefore my philosophical lens changed. Finding the thrust of reductionist and structural functionalist studies incongruent with my own research experience, I chose instead to take a theoretical approach more suited to critical or emancipatory research. Relativism and the context of knowledge production in the world of disability sport are highlighted in the last two studies. In the third study (Chapter 4), critical theory informs both the data collection and the discussion of results. The final study (Chapter 5) involves tenets of interpretive theory and social constructive thought. Although often change-producing, this study was not necessarily emancipatory in nature. The purpose of this final study is to understand the perspective of the female administrator relative to her participation in disability sport. This third perspective has not been formally studied in this context and should provide insight into the female administrator's capacity to act independently of structural constraints. Specific theoretical approaches are outlined in each study.

In providing a contextual framework for this project, it is necessary to examine the way in which meaning or knowledge has been produced in elite disability sport. Social scientific knowledge as it relates to disability sport is in its infancy. Only recently have scholars begun to examine the way in which knowledge is produced, verified and reinforced in our field. Despite contextual differences, the expansive work and literature in sport sociology on the able-bodied athlete provides foundational support for future inquiry and examination into disability sport.

Of specific interest currently are the choices we make as sport scientists and their relationship to the economic, social and political issues of those we study (Cole, 1994). These choices include assumptions embedded in the theoretical framework, method, analysis, and reporting techniques used by researchers. In most sport sociological research using the feminist perspective, the dominant belief is that sport is socially constructed and gendered - as male or masculine. Often this construction has led to a perceived discrepancy between being both a female and an elite athlete. In other words, the elements associated with the dominant elite sporting experience have historically been used to reinforce social values, power relations, and conflicts between dominant groups and less powerful groups.

In Michael Messner's (1992) work, Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity, the masculine characteristics of sport are examined using a feminist frame of analysis. He states that the historical influence of initial sporting events in the 19th Century in both Europe and North America prepared the "character" of young men to be better soldiers, leaders, citizens and rulers. However, rather than defining masculinity as some "buried biological essence of manhood," Messner maintains that it too is socially constructed, and thus the concept of masculinity varies historically and cross-culturally. This social construction of sport which prepares individuals to be "instrumental," "aggressive," and "dominating," has extended to the female's sporting arena. On most playing fields the female athlete is considered a superior athlete if she can maintain a personae that reflects typical masculine (gender) attributes. For many female athletes, the highest praise received on the playing field is "she throws like a boy" or "she has a cool head." As sport sociologists began to notice this phenomenon in able-bodied sport they developed a conceptual framework to examine the "role conflicts" that female athletes experienced when they were expected to be both an athlete and a woman (Allison, 1991). While researchers continued to evaluate women athletes based on this "role conflict" model, they developed an image of the traditional female athlete: one who was struggling with her femininity and her athleticism (Hall, 1988). Boutilier and San Giovanni (1983) describe the social construction of this theory:

> Underlying most analyses of role conflict is an uncritical acceptance of the traditional role of woman and the conventional arrangement of sport. To ask if a woman can remain a woman and still play sports means that one has in mind a view of women and of sport that accepts the socially constructed definition of these two realities as contradictory and conflicting. (p. 117)

This analysis is especially relevant when exploring how the female athlete's experience fits or does not fit the dominant sporting experience: that of the male athlete. The assumption that males, especially able-bodied males, are the standard for the entire population has been ingrained in most scientific disciplines and is a critical issue in current feminist and qualitative scholarship (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983; DePauw, 1994).

I aim to extend this discussion and argue that elite sport itself is also socially constructed as able-bodied and that being both a person with a disability and an elite athlete places the informants of this study in a perceived "role conflict" model. Treating physical difference as an obstacle to overcome is not unusual in studies examining the participation of women in sport and the problem is further compounded by the addition of and treatment of disability as a variable. Historically, research in disability sport has been grounded in the rehabilitative and bio-medical sciences (Williams, 1994). This bio-medical orthodoxy in the literature is not surprising since sport for people with a disability was first provided as an avenue for men to overcome the disabling conditions they sustained in World War II (DePauw & Gavron, 1995; Jackson & Davis, 1983; Steadward, 1996).

In order to address the prevalence of "role conflict" and "malestream" research within sport sociology, feminist scholars and researchers have called for women-centred research that acknowledges the unique experiences of women within sport (Allison, 1991; Cole, 1994; Hall, 1985, 1988; Theberge, 1981). In other words, research that acknowledges the production of gender roles in sport. This project follows that initiative by putting the athlete with a disability at the centre of the research, as an active participant in the production of knowledge related to women, disability, and elite sport.

Paradigm Shift

Identifying my paradigmatic preferences in this project fits within the framework provided by Guba and Lincoln (1994). The scientific paradigm, as I perceive it, is a basic set of beliefs or world views that define for the holder the nature of the "world" and the "individual's place in it," both human constructions. According to Guba and Lincoln

(1994), inquiry paradigms define for the inquirers the assumptions embedded in research and what falls inside and outside the limits of legitimate inquiry. Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose three fundamental questions to guide researchers attempting naturalistic research: the ontological question, the epistemological question, and the methodological question. They preface their explanation by acknowledging that even this model will shift, but it is still a useful device to focus discussion and facilitate clarity:

> The basic beliefs that define inquiry paradigms can be summarized by the responses given by proponents of any given paradigm to three fundamental questions, which are interconnected in such a way that the answer given to any one question, taken in any order, constrains how the others may be answered. (p. 108)

These four studies were completed over a two year period during which my explanatory framework and epistemology shifted. The first two studies were used to test presuppositions or the conviction that a fixed set of laws or patterns or mechanisms accounted for the gendered differences in disability sport. Thus the first study included both the perceptions of male and female informants. This study found few differences in experience relative to gender but provided the basis for further study. Participatory issues of the female athlete were documented in the second study, which led to the inquiry becoming more focussed and the interpretations more specific to participatory contexts. A paradigmatic shift became apparent when more specific theoretical underpinnings were applied in the final two studies. This shift is seen in the move from grounded theory and a relatively structural-functionalist approach in the first two studies to social constructive theory and a more critical approach in the final studies. According to Harre and Krausz (1996) Kuhnian statements (1970) about relativist interpretation of the natural sciences involve three major points which are expressed in the structure of scientific revolution:

1. Paradigm change transforms the science in which it occurs by transforming the standards governing what are to count as acceptable solutions to problems.
2. The post-paradigm normal science tradition that emerges from a paradigm change is not only incompatible but also incommensurable with that which has gone before. (Kuhn, 1970)

- Since the perceptual gestalten through which scientists perceive the world are changed when paradigms change the post-paradigm world-as-perceived will be different from the pre-paradigm world. (Kuhn, 1970)

In summarizing the above points, Harre and Krausz (1996) state:

> not only does a paradigm switch alter an inquirer's explanatory scheme in some rather dramatic ways but it also changes what that person thinks the explanatory scheme is offered to explain. There is at once an epistemological and ontological switch. Theories offered in different paradigms are simply about different things. (p. 78)

It is my intent to let these four studies, although contextually linked, stand in isolation, each providing a piece of the puzzle, shedding light on the situations, expressed in relative terms. For the purpose of coherence and clarification, I attempt to outline my ontological and epistemological choices relative to the theoretical framework that best informs the approach, the methodology and the discussion in the separate studies.

Feminist Inquiry

In all four studies, I combined or synthesized a number of methods and theoretical approaches. Although I differentiate between grounded theory, critical theory, and social constructivism, I am not implying that there are distinct boundaries between each approach. Often the researcher's choice of a paradigm or theoretical framework is based on utility rather than a deep personal commitment to the "world view" expressed in a specific theory. However, throughout this project I am informed by a personal commitment, and I subscribe to a belief system that is grounded in feminist theory. I am wary of the tendency to "categorize" feminisms in research (e.g., Marxist, radical, lesbian, liberal) because it fragments the scope and nature of inquiry. Instead I relate the aspects of feminist theory which informed my research, recognizing the fundamental limitations of this and all theories.

Feminist theory is an axis which runs through all four studies, complementing and reinforcing the other theoretical and methodological choices. Basic to feminist theory is the belief that traditional scientific methods leave unexamined the context of discovery, which is considered nonrational and therefore exempt from analysis. According to Alcoff and Potter (1993), "these methods neglect to identify the social desires, interests, and values that have shaped the sciences."

Bar On (1993) argues that feminist claims have emerged as counterpoints to the Enlightenment strategies for claiming authority, as such, feminist arguments have been framed within the Enlightenment's terms of discourse and replicate its repressive mechanisms for claiming the authority and privilege to silence others. For example, in the application of feminist theory, researchers have falsely universalized the experiences and concerns of white, middle-class, able-bodied, young, heterosexual women in sport to all other female populations (Dewar, 1993). Likewise, Dewar (1993) argues that standpoint theory has been used in ways to suggest the existence of "generic women" with generic experiences of oppression in sport. In order to provide a more inclusive feminist research agenda that contains both a critique of traditional scientific practices and recommendations for change, the relative privilege of the researcher, nominated in my ability to choose the research topic and methodology, must be acknowledged.

DePauw (1997) shows how the traditional scientific view of the body - namely as a dismembered body - is being challenged via feminist critiques and replaced by feminist understandings of the body as holistic and socially constructed:

> Although the body has been central to our field, we have studied it in parts and not necessarily as a whole or in relation to society. We have argued nature/nurture and relied mostly on biological essentialism. This reliance on biological essentialism has reinforced our traditional views of the body and the quest for the "ideal" body. It is only recently that the body and bodies have become a focus of scholarly inquiry and has been aided by feminist theory. (p. 419)

While not all feminist research has been conscious of its own limitations and social context, recent work reveals that with such self-consciousness feminist theory can be integrated successfully with other perspectives without losing its critical essence. McDaniel (1996) supports the inclusion and combination of feminist theory with demography, stating that the synthesis of both the strength of quantifiable, macro level perspectives is commensurable with feminist perspectives. I am in agreement with her perceptions of the strengths inherent in feminist theory:

> The essence and strengths of feminist perspectives are found in their theoretical, qualitative, biohistorical, integrative, and epistemologically challenging stances, producing insights into the personal and political/social, and simultaneously, into lived realities and systems of power and discourse. (p. 97)

For the purpose of this research, the basic principles intersecting the study were adapted from Stanley and Wise (1983).

1. Women should define and interpret their own experiences, and women need to re-define and re-name what others (males or experts) have defined for them.
2. The personal and everyday are important and must be the subject of feminist inquiry.
3. Individual reality must not be downgraded, sneered at, or otherwise patronized.

> 4. Feminists must attempt to reject the scientist/person dichotomy and endeavour to dismantle the power relationship that exists between researcher and researched.
>
> 5. The process of the research must be central to any account of feminist research, because without including an account of the process, the sources of the researcher's knowledge are hidden from scrutiny (and how or why she claims what she does or knows).
>
> 6. Feminist research explores the basis of everyday knowledge by starting from the experiences of the researcher as a person and those with whom she explores the phenomenon. (p. 194)

Terminology

I have tried to be sensitive to terminology. I do not want to produce dialogue full of mystifying jargon and what some call "buzz" words used in feminist and sociological discourse. Lofland and Lofland (1984) express a commonly held view of the confusion surrounding terminology:

> Social Science is a terminological jungle where many labels compete, and no single label has been able to command the particular domain before us. Often...

> researchers simply 'do it' without worrying about giving
> 'it' a name. (p. 3)

For the purpose of this project, I have attached labels to the ideas being expressed. The following is a set of operational terms used in this research. Some of the terminology has been extracted from feminist and qualitative literature and modified to clarify my research perspective. I am not trying to initiate debate on epistemological perspectives, but simply offering insight into the perspective I have taken relative to this research.

Elite Disability Sport: Paralympic Sport is the venue in which highly motivated athletes, whose objectives are to excel and reach their personal limits, participate in a wide range of international competitions. At this level, sport is practised for reasons beyond those of rehabilitation, prescribed exercise, and recreation (Steadward, 1994). For the purpose of these studies, elite sport will be limited to International Paralympic Committee sanctioned events: Paralympic Games, World Championships, World Cup Competitions, World Games, and Regional Championships.

Empiricism: An epistemological doctrine based on the supposition that the only source of knowledge is experience. In sociology, it is used positively to describe the kind of inquiry which tries to avoid untested theoretical speculation and to aim always at the provision of quantitative, empirical evidence. It is suggested that empiricism tends to reduce the importance of theory on one hand and, on the other, underestimates the technical and theoretical difficulties of gathering reliable data. (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1988)

Epistemology: The study or theory of the nature of, and grounds for, the development and production of knowledge, especially with reference to its limits and validity.

Feminism: The general theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes.

Feminist Epistemology: Concerns the development of new criteria related to what counts as knowledge, rather than knowledge about women being tagged onto existing sexist knowledge (Stanley & Wise, 1983). In other words, just the inclusion of the female athlete into the research is not enough, we must also examine fundamental ideas such as "science," "basic standards," and "scientific development." Fitting women into existing theories and concepts rather than critically examining these theories and concepts from a feminist point of view, or indeed any other, has been the historical basis of gender studies within the field of adapted physical activity.

Gender: Refers to social and psychological characteristics and behaviours associated with females and males. Current feminist scholars argue that gender attributes are socially constructed and are neither dichotomous, nor biologically based. (Gill, 1994)

Positivism: A theory which posits that theology and metaphysics are imperfect modes of knowledge. Positive knowledge is based on natural phenomena and their properties and relations as verified by the empirical sciences. The positivistic approach constructs general laws or theories which express relationships between phenomena. Observation and experience fit the theory;

explanation of phenomena consists in showing that there are instances of general laws or regularities. In sociology, positivism is identified with a conviction that sociology, like physics, can be scientifically analysed with a marked preference for measurement and quantification, and a tendency towards social-structural (reductionist) explanations as distinct from those which refer to human intentions and motives. (adapted from Abercrombie et al., 1988)

Qualitative Research: Implies a direct concern with experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or 'undergone.' Therefore, qualitative research has the aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel or live it. (Sherman & Webb, 1988)

Sex: The biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia and the related difference in reproductive function. (Oakley, 1972)

Social Constructivism: From a social constructivist stance, disability and impairment are essentially storied and eminently social. One indicator of the various and ever-changing constructions of the body (disability) consists of the metaphors that have been attached to the body in different historical periods. (Sparkes, 1997)

Structural Functionalism: Refers to a sociological perspective based on the concept of the social structure and the view that society is prior to an individual's understanding of it. It is the structure of a society's ideas and beliefs with which a structural functionalist is concerned (Williams, 1994). These systems are viewed as 'normal' or having 'pathological' states - thus connoting system equilibrium and homeostasis. (Turner, 1978)

Data Analysis

As the researcher, the most difficult aspect of this project occurred during what I identify as my "interpretive crisis period." Faced with over 1200 pages of data, field notes, reports, and my own lived experience, I found myself pondering the initial research assumptions and my inadequacy at being able to provide the "reader" with a map of my thought processes relative to the theoretical nature of each study, and the project in its entirety. Realizing that the final analysis would only be my interpretation of the lived experiences of the informants, I struggled with identifying those assumptions and biases derived from my own lived experience as an athlete, sport administrator, teacher and woman. Finding a discrete analytical framework which "fit" the value system or belief system that invited discussion on this topic was unsatisfying, as described previously. Likewise, believing that methodological choices are bound in theoretical and ideological positions, I was soon overwhelmed by the scope of this endeavour. Denzin (1994) in describing the "art of interpretation" warned of this pitfall:

> This preoccupation with prior theory can stand in the way of the researcher's attempts to hear and listen to the interpretive theories that operate in the situation studied. (p. 508)

Interpreting the information gleaned from this research requires both the awareness of prior theoretical beliefs impacting my research choices and the acknowledgement of an alternate construction of theory by the participants and informants in the study.

> At least, qualitative researchers need to understand just how they are construing "theory" as analysis proceeds, because that construction will - consciously or not - inevitably influence and constrain data collection, data reduction, data display, and the drawing and verification of conclusions. (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 434)

What I came to realize, and what I hope to translate to the reader in this chapter is my insight into the theoretical and methodological journey taken in this research. Most importantly, to illustrate the realization that "theory" is permeable, fluid, and constantly shifting. I believe that there is no perfect truth, no either/or dichotomy to uncover, no inclusive theoretical framework which absorbs all of the variables revealed in qualitative research. The resulting explanation is an attempt to describe this research as I experienced it. According to Stanley and Wise (1991), this is not the most hygienic approach:

> And the point at which realization occurs that this is "research as it is described" and not "research as experienced" tends to be the point at which one is seeking to present research to academic colleagues. Pressures to present research material as though order, neatness, and so on, had prevailed are very strong, partly because of the increasing use of publications as a criterion of academic standing and achievement, and partly because comparatively few examples of other approaches exist.

> That is, there is always the possibility that lack of neatness, order, and so on is the result of one's failure to do research "properly." (p. 266)

Given my ontological and epistemological positions, and the feminist theme running throughout my discourse, I concluded that qualitative methodology provided the most authenticity in my data collection. Based on my lived experience in research, within both the positivistic and naturalistic paradigms, the qualitative method corresponded well with my view of science. Although other approaches are valuable, I believe in naturalistic inquiry, inductive analysis, holistic perspectives, personal contact and insight, dynamic systems, context sensitivity, empathic neutrality (complete objectivity is impossible), and design flexibility. These themes are more thoroughly explained in Patton (1989), and guided me in designing data collection procedures.

To be more explicit, I am in agreement with the following statements made by Sherman and Webb (1988) on qualitative research:

> 1. Events can be understood adequately only if they are seen in context. Therefore, a qualitative researcher immerses her/himself in the setting.
> 2. The contexts of inquiry are not contrived; they are natural. Nothing is predefined or taken for granted.
> 3. Qualitative researchers want those who are studied to speak for themselves and to provide their perspectives in words and other actions. Therefore, qualitative research is an intense process in which

> the persons studied teach the researcher about their lives.
>
> 4. Qualitative researchers attend to the experience as a whole, not as separate variables. The aim of qualitative research is to understand the experience as unified.
> 5. Qualitative methods are appropriate to the above statements. There is no one general method.
> 6. For many qualitative researchers, the process entails appraisal about what was studied. (pp. 5-8)

Finally, faced with an abundance of data and field notes, I sought computer software to assist and expedite the analysis of data. Initially, I used the NUD*IST Qualitative Analysis Software Program which was useful in organizing text and categorical files, but it did not produce results that accurately reflect the feelings or impressions that I held about the data. Furthermore, upon checking the validity of the interpretation with some of the participants, I found a discrepancy between the meaning they attached and the hierarchical value assigned by the computer program. This qualitative analysis software also has built in assumptions about theory, and I found that the hierarchical nature of coding used in NUD*IST (Huberman & Miles, 1994) constrained my interpretation. After three months of working with the program, I turned to a "cut and paste" technique using WordPerfect (Version 5.1) Word Processing Software (Appendix B). Although this technique was more time consuming and arduous, it allowed for more theoretical and interpretive flexibility. Likewise, this analytical approach allowed for more researcher reflexivity and informant response to categories and thematic development. According to Henderson (1991) the researcher must remain flexible until the possibility for new emerging explanations or hypotheses have been exhausted. She states that all data should be evaluated concerning the relationship it has to the unfolding story. Rather than simply checking the final product, informants were actively involved in the interpretive process and creating the resulting narrative. Given the different theoretical underpinnings of each study, a discussion of each specific qualitative methodology is contained in the appropriate chapter.

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CHAPTER 2

Gendered Perceptions of Disability in Relation to Sport and Physical Activity

Introduction

Gender inequity and associated issues have been identified in previous work focussing on the able-bodied sport world (Eccles & Harold, 1991; Hall, 1988, 1993; Theberge, 1985). Feminist researchers argue that the experience of the female athlete in able-bodied sport differs from that of the male athlete because of the way in which society constructs gender and applies this construction to sporting contexts (Hall, 1993). Historically, the dominant perspective in research related to the social construction of gender and sport has been based on a presumed "role conflict," or paradox, between female athleticism and femininity (Allison, 1991). Assuming that the characteristics associated both with being a woman valued by society and an elite athlete were in conflict, many studies have examined the ways in which female athletes could adapt or improve their sporting behaviour in order to "fit in" to sport in a male preserve (Theberge, 1985).

In 1993, Hall examined the meaning, potential, and prospects of feminist cultural studies of sport. Specifically, she exposed many of the underlying assumptions driving the discourse surrounding gender and sport as "malestream theories" which do not take into account the production and reproduction of traditional gender roles. Assuming that sporting practices are historically produced, socially constructed, and culturally defined to serve the interests and needs of the dominant group, Hall proposes a "new set of scientific tools" necessary to understand the relationships between gender, class, race, and ethnicity in the construction of sport and sport practices. Moreover, the assumption that a homogeneity of experience exists among women involved in sport and physical activity, regardless of race, ethnicity or socio-economic status, has been called into question (Smith, 1992; Birrell, 1990).

Interestingly, these researchers have not extended the discussion to include the social construction of disability and how it interrelates, disguises, or impacts the lived experience of the female involved in sport and physical activity. Perhaps disability and the plethora of issues surrounding the lives of women with disability seem too vast, complex, or overwhelming to include in the discourse surrounding women and sport. Or perhaps the associated "malestream" theories which have driven the field of disability studies seem insurmountable to feminist researchers in able-bodied sport.

The "medical model" or traditional rehabilitation orthodoxy has historically informed the research in adapted physical activity and disability sport. This model, traditionally informed by positivist assumptions, may have contributed to the lack of acknowledgement by feminist researchers of women with a disability involved in physical activity and sport. Likewise, simply generalizing from able-bodied sport to disability sport ignores or erases the significance of the athlete's experience within disability sport. Although the issues for both groups may be similar, simply accepting current theoretical models based upon the issues of able-bodied athletes and applying them to men and women with a disability negates the experience for athletes with a disability and overlooks the historical and political context of that experience. This trend of accepting current models of male participation in disability sport and generalizing to the participatory experiences of the female denies her the right to name her own experience and also her own reality when it differs from the norm.

Despite the complexity of the experience, sociological research addressing participation and disability sport has been somewhat atheoretical, or if theoretical underpinnings are identifiable, the majority of research has been grounded in positivism, and especially structural functionalism (Williams, 1994a). When gender has been included as a variable, it has been in an attempt to show the difference in participation patterns and to identify socializing agents of sport and physical activity (Sherrill & Williams, 1996; Williams, 1994b). The need for feminist theory in the study of gender in disability sport has been discussed in several works (DePauw, 1994; Kolkka & Williams, 1997; Sherrill, 1993). However, Begum (1992) and Wendell (1993) have acknowledged that the feminist theory paradigm is often inadequate when examining disability. Wendell (1993) argues that in order to build a feminist theory of disability that takes adequate account of our differences, we will need to know how experiences of disability and social oppression of people with disabilities interact with sexism, racism, and class oppression (p. 51). The tapestry of experience becomes more tightly woven with each variable considered and thus more difficult to discern. Furthermore, studying gender difference and the like discounts the complexity of the female or male experience with disability.

Given the formative stage of sociological research in this area, the purpose of the first study was to explore issues gleaned from the personal experiences of men and women with a disability in a sport-physical activity program. The purpose of the research was not to make generalizations about all men and women with disabilities involved in sport and physical activity based on a representative sample, but to gather comparative impressions of their experiences as a starting point for further research. Specifically, the results of this study were used to establish a question framework which was incorporated into the next study (Chapter 3) whose purpose is to examine the perceptions of elite female athletes and the sporting context in which they operate (Olenik, Matthews, & Steadward, 1995).

As mentioned previously the present study was intended to be a "starting point" in the research on women and disability sport. The focus on gender includes identification of both male and female participants, in order to determine how the female athlete's lived experience was different from, or similar to, that of male athletes. It is argued that acknowledging both male and female experiences presents a clearer picture of disability and its interaction with sport and gender, laying the groundwork for future investigation.

Theoretical Context

Grounded theory as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990) informed this study. A dearth of literature exists regarding the relationship between gender, disability, and sport. Consequently, this study was of an exploratory nature, the "starting point" of the entire project. Grounded theory was chosen because of the purported inherent faithfulness to the everyday reality of the informants:

> A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to

> that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge. (p. 23)

Ontological Perspective

Following the grounded theory model, I considered this research to be primarily reductionist. Definitions of social reality, in this case elite disability sport, were fluid. The reality of my informants was created through human interaction, but the attaching of labels, categories and ultimate thematic discussion is a result of grouping like interpretations and discarding those that did not fit the emerging categories.

Epistemological Perspective

I believe that the traditional tenets in grounded theory assume a measure of objectivity. It is believed that the findings are presented value-free, and it is up to the reader to find a "fit" with his or her pre-existing reality.

An agent/informant-based approach was used as detailed in the naturalistic inquiry literature (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Siedman, 1991). In other words, the information one seeks is said to be grounded in the informant's experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This approach is also used frequently in research informed by feminist theory. The qualitative method, in the form of focus groups and individual interviews, was chosen as the most rigorous means by which to examine the phenomenon under study (Stewart & Shamdasini, 1990). According to Seidman (1991), the purpose of the in-depth interview is not to get answers to questions, or to test hypotheses, nor is it to "evaluate" as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. In accordance with this definition, I chose to conceptualize this study as interpretive in nature, rather than critical. The basic difference is that the purpose of the study was to provide a description of how a participant's meaning system is generated and sustained, or how the respondent attaches meaning to the issues he or she faces. My intent was not to provide a critique which explains how social conditions are maintained; nor was it my intent to examine competing explanations. Feminist theory also provided a lens through which I could analyze my work. In my opinion, gender as a category of analysis has not been adequately dealt with in the traditional positivist paradigm. Specifically, because of the nature of positivism, gender is defined by the biological labels of male and female and usually examined in isolation. According to Alcoff and Potter (1993), gender is not the primary axis of oppression in our society, but a variable inseparable from other axes of oppression (e.g., race, socio-economic status, etc.). I accept and subscribe to the multi-dimensional nature of feminist epistemology. In other words, I choose not to categorize myself, except to say feminist theory informs my research, and I am a feminist. Additionally, I perceive my informants as being multi-faceted, whole people, not singularly influenced by gender, disability, race, or culture:

> Gender as a category of analysis cannot be abstracted from a particular context while other factors are held stable; gender can never be observed as a "pure" or solitary influence. Because gender as an abstract universal is not a

> useful analytical category and because research has revealed a plethora of oppressions at work in productions of knowledge, feminist epistemology is emerging as a research program with multiple dimensions. (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 5)

As previously stated my intent is to examine the gendered understanding of disability within the context of physical activity.

Informants

Informants for this study were five men and five women with a disability who participated in the Athlete Training Program at the Rick Hansen Centre, University of Alberta. Participation in this study was promoted on fliers posted and announcements made at the training sessions. Informants were chosen through purposeful selection (Patton, 1990). Selection was based first on the participant's willingness and apparent interest to be involved in the research project; and secondly, the participant's willingness and ability to articulate his or her thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. This criteria promoted self-selection by informants, rather than a random selection by the researcher (Seidman, 1991). Six of the ten had been or were currently involved in elite sport. Seven of the ten had congenital disabilities, while the other three had acquired disabilities. Disabilities represented included cerebral palsy, spinal cord injury, and polio. Further descriptive statistics are shown in Table 2-1. All of the participants signed an informed consent form (Appendix C) guaranteeing confidentiality and were given an informant information sheet (Appendix D) explaining the project.

Table 2-1

Descriptive Statistics of Informants: Gender Study

Demographic	Statistics
Sex	5 Women 5 Men
Age Range	19 - 35
Sport Status	6 Elite 4 Recreational
Disability	1 with Polio 6 with Cerebral Palsy 3 with Spinal Cord Injuries
Education	4 University Degrees (2 men, 2 women) 6 Some University Experience
Employment	7 Employed and Self-Supporting 3 University Students (2 women, 1 man)
Life Status	1 Married (woman) 9 Never Married
Nationality	10 Canadian

Method

Qualitative data and descriptive statistics were collected using the following methods: focus group, individual interview, researcher observation and researcher notation.

Focus groups were used to identify issues relevant to both men and women, in order to develop a question framework for use in the individual interviews. Focus group procedures followed those outlined by Stewart and Shamdasini (1990). Each group had five participants with at least two members of the same sex. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours and was guided by two facilitators, myself and a male colleague familiar with this qualitative method. Participants were asked to discuss issues that were important to them as people with a disability in today's society and culture. They were also asked to discuss their physical activity experiences and the way in which sport has, or has not, impacted their lives.

Following the transcription of focus group tapes, both researchers developed specific questions for the individual interviews (Appendix E). Both sets of questions were then compared for internal consistency. Overlapping concepts or redundancies were removed and the resulting questions were inclusive of both researcher's perspectives. The focus groups provided information which allowed me to construct meaningful questions that take into account how these individuals typically talk about and attach meaning to certain topics. According to Morgan (1991), this methodology allows for the inclusion of meaningful items in the construction of survey and interview instruments. During the individual interviews, a series of questions were posed that explored the issues raised within the focus group sessions. Each individual interview lasted between one and one and a half hours.

Follow-up telephone and personal interviews were used to ensure the content validity of the initial results. These secondary interviews were used to build and demystify certain categories, and to make linkages in the data in order to put conceptual order to the mass of data (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). Research notes and a research journal were kept to record the impressions and personal interpretations of the researcher. This provided a record of personal thoughts, interview notes, coding procedures and other relevant documentation. This process is intended to increase one's measure of objectivity by continuously accounting for researcher subjectivity (Code, 1993).

To uncover and link salient issues and categories I used an iterative procedure adapted from Huberman and Miles (1994). Iterative research procedures call for the use of analytical induction and usually contain a succession of question-and-answer cycles that entail the examination of a given set of cases/categories and refining and modifying those cases/categories on the basis of subsequent information (Huberman & Miles, 1994). According to Huberman & Miles (1994):

> these procedures correspond to the "grounded theory" approach, which itself shares important features with other approaches to interpretive analysis (generative analysis, constructive analysis, "illuminative" analysis). In all these cases a theme, hypothesis, or pattern is identified inductively, the researcher then moves into verification mode, trying to confirm or qualify the finding. This then keys off a new iterative or inductive cycle. (p. 431)

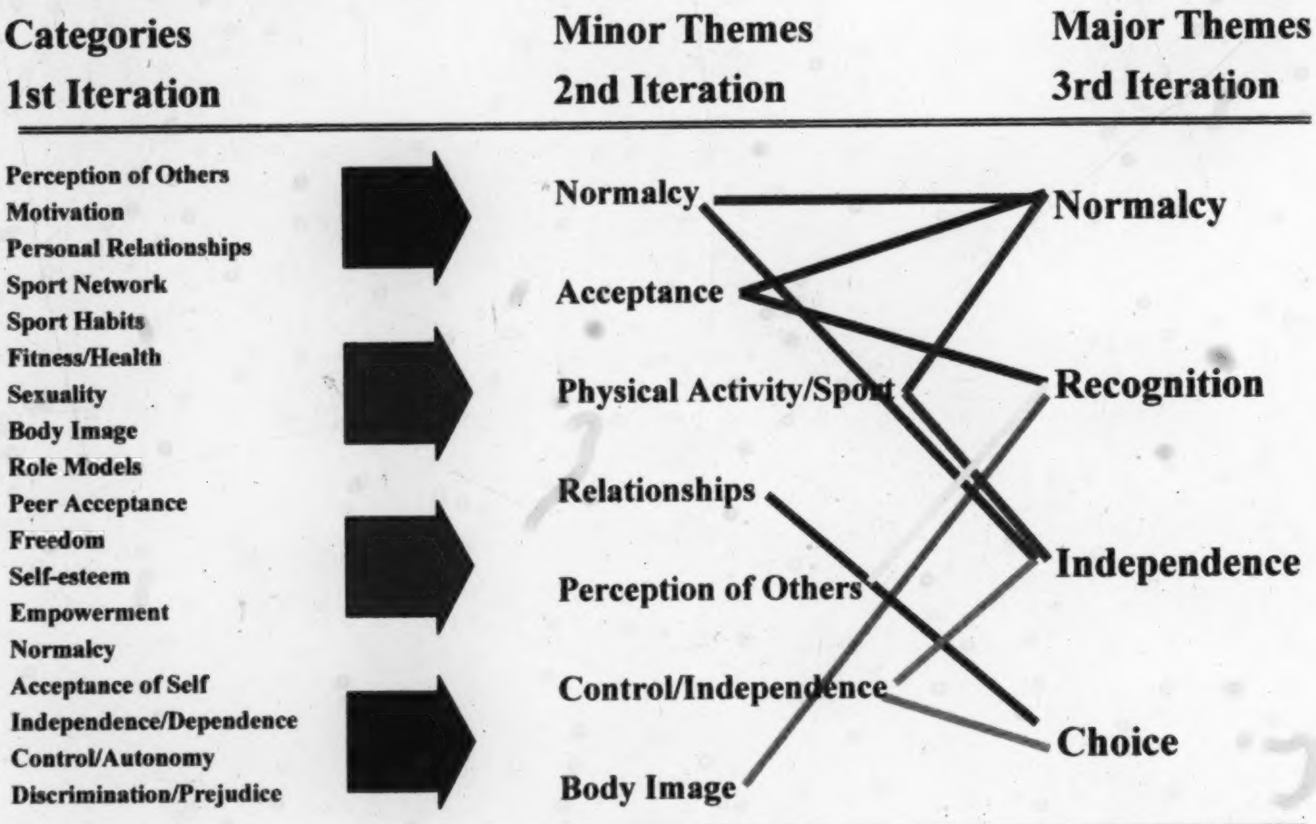
Using this mode, transcription and analysis were completed using word processing software (WordPerfect Version 5.1) on an IBM PC computer, allowing the researcher to "cut and paste" during analysis (Appendix B). As concepts and categories emerged, they were transferred to appropriately labelled files and verified through the above mentioned procedures. A second iteration of data was completed to identify minor themes or general relationships between categories. A third iteration of data was then completed to remove duplication and to allow for expansion and clarification. The major themes were then reviewed with the informants during follow-up interviews. These final interviews allowed me to further discuss the themes identified and improve the accuracy and content validity in the final analysis (Seidman, 1991; Patton, 1990).

The iterative process produced what was verified by the informants as the most salient issues affecting their participation in sport and physical activity. Table 2-2 provides the reader with a visual description of the iterative process or pattern. These "connections" were then called to the reader's attention for inspection and further exploration. This is an alternative to the issue of generalizability of results (Seidman, 1991) and is in harmony with my choice of theory.

Results

Following the first iteration of data, 18 categories emerged. These categories were labelled: Perception of Others, Motivation, Relationships, Support, Sport Habits, Fitness and Health, Sexuality, Body Image, Role Models, Peer Acceptance, Freedom, Self-Esteem, Empowerment, Normalcy, Acceptance of Self, Independence and Dependence, Control and Autonomy, and Prejudice. Each category encompassed a broad range of issues and subjects, however, it must be stressed that these labels were not static. They were expected to change, collapse, or increase in order to include all themes or issues which may not have appeared in the first iteration and to decrease once relationships and duplications were identified. After the second iteration of the data, seven of the categories were designated as minor themes which overlapped the other 12 categories. These minor themes were: Normalcy, Acceptance, Physical Activity - Sport, Relationships, Perception

Table 2-2
Results: Gender Study



Categories
1st Iteration

Perception of Others
Motivation
Personal Relationships
Sport Network
Sport Habits
Fitness/Health
Sexuality
Body Image
Role Models
Peer Acceptance
Freedom
Self-esteem
Empowerment
Normalcy
Acceptance of Self
Independence/Dependence
Control/Autonomy
Discrimination/Prejudice

Minor Themes
2nd Iteration

Normalcy
Acceptance
Physical Activity/Sport
Relationships
Perception of Others
Control/Independence
Body Image

Major Themes
3rd Iteration

Normalcy
Recognition
Independence
Choice

of Others, Control - Independence, and Body Image. Upon completion of the third iteration of data, which included informal follow-up interviews, the seven minor themes were collapsed into four major themes: **Normalcy, Recognition, Independence**, and **Choice**.

In the initial analysis, gender differences were not readily apparent. However, by probing deeper into the issues during follow-up interviews, a difference between the way in which these respondents attached meaning to their issues became apparent. In other words, the identification and labeling of perceptions for both the male and female participants were similar, but the way they perceived, explored and reconciled their issues differed according to gender. The following discussion of major themes illustrates these differences and similarities.

Normalcy

Normalcy was an issue for every informant, and included concerns related primarily to acceptance. To be perceived by others as "normal" was important to all of the participants. Normalcy influenced decisions about career, relationships, lifestyle, and whether or not they chose to participate in sport or recreation. Sport and physical activity was described as a "vehicle to normalcy" by both the male and female participants, as illustrated in the following statement:

> After I got hurt, I came to the Centre, I saw the guys that were the most physically and financially independent and they were playing wheelchair basketball. I thought if you are in a wheelchair the cool thing to do is play wheelchair basketball, so that is what I did. It helped me grow a lot, being part of the team, being physically independent. A strong physical personae has helped me achieve a more able-bodied lifestyle. Right or wrong, that is how I perceive it and that is why I push myself. When I first got hurt, to regain my physical being, to play basketball, to learn again how to interact, how to do things normally. (♂)

The gender difference appeared when the participants were asked whose perception of "normal" was important. For the men in the group, it was society's (the able-bodied world's) perception of them that was crucial, while the women in the study felt that normalcy was related to their perception of themselves. Normalcy for the male participants meant being as close to able-bodied as possible:

> My biggest issue is self-acceptance, and acceptance by others as normal. But, the only problem is your friends still try to remember you as you were and the rush is to get back to close to how you were previously so that you kind of deserve that acceptance. I guess I don't accept the things that are attached to being in this chair, like being slower, somewhat weaker. I want respect like everyone else, and I work on my body, probably more than the average person. It is sort of a competition between me and my disability. I want people to see that I am strong, independent and in control and get past the wheels. (♂)

Some of the women talked about a "freedom" associated with finally accepting themselves as normal, as expressed by two of the female informants:

> Being normal to me is total acceptance. Now I let my body be my guide. I just accept my physical limitations. Sometimes I still get really frustrated. Why did God give me such lousy feet and all this energy? But, I've come to accept that this is it, and if my feet start to hurt, I honour it, and say I can't do this today. Accepting this as normal for me, gives me the freedom to pursue other things. When I don't have to focus on trying to be able-bodied, then you can focus on what you really want in life and there is real freedom in that. (♀)

> I used to worry about people accepting me. It wasn't working, because you are tied down and held captive to other people's perceptions. But, when you come to a place where you accept who you are and this is for anybody, athlete or not...when you accept yourself there is a freedom in that because you are not looking or searching for someone to tell you that you are okay. When you know that, when you come to that place, especially around your disability, then people around you react to it. (♀)

The women in the group felt that accepting their disability as normal meant accepting their difference and therefore accepting themselves as limited only with reference to able-bodied constructions.

Independence

Both male and female participants felt that being involved in physical activity, whether recreationally or competitively, was extremely valuable on their journey to independence. For all participants, the Rick Hansen Centre was seen as a "stepping stone," a place where they could learn the skills they needed to take responsibility for their own health and well-being. Sport and physical activity within this environment was seen as a safe and comfortable way to participate without the scrutiny of the able-bodied public:

> After my accident, I was very weak and suddenly had to ask for help. So working out was a way of getting my strength back and it made it a lot easier to cope with being in a wheelchair. You know, the good looking guys are the physical guys and if you are weak and not able, people will look more down on you. The Rick Hansen Centre was just the ticket for me to get strength and independence back. (♂)

While both the men and women valued the independence associated with having control over their bodies, the men often stated that independence was more important for men with disabilities than for women with disabilities. All of the male participants surmised that fewer women were involved in physical activity and sport because women in general did not need to be as independent as men in our society. One participant stated that fewer women were involved because sport was a masculine thing and women were more concerned about reflecting a feminine image. In other words, it was acceptable for a women with a disability to rely on others for physical assistance, but men needed to be able to "hold their own:"

> I think society expects men to be strong and in control, if a guy falls out of his chair and needs help, people may respond a little more slowly. Give him time to get back in himself. Whereas, with a woman, people are more comfortable with helping her back in. It is sort of more okay for her to be

> dependent. I also think that emotional dependency is expected more from women, especially disabled women. (♂)
>
> Well, women are brought up that they are supposed to look pretty. All of the super models, they couldn't throw the shot put very well. Women want to be like the super model, not the shot putter. I think control and strength aren't so important, you see more women involved in tennis, where you can run around in a short little skirt, not wheelchair sports, because probably by the nature they require just pure strength. (♂)

Subsequent interviews with the women did not support this argument. In fact, many of the women felt that physical activity and sport were paramount in their lives. Sport and physical activity offered one of the few avenues available to women with a disability to express themselves through "the physical," to assert their independence and strength:

> I love sport. I really want to get in there and I don't have to be great at it. I do it for the real enjoyment of participating and being part of it. Part of it is the socializing, but most of it is just being physical. Just being physically active, competing, and pushing myself. I can do it on my own, and for awhile I feel like an athlete first, a disabled woman second. I am independent of those other labels and do not have to define myself as dependent. (♀)

Choice

In a society which promotes idealized images of men as strong, sleek, powerful, wealthy and handsome; and women as beautiful, thin, graceful, talented, clever and nurturing, disability (if acknowledged) is categorized as the "Other." Being a person with a disability or being disabled is at the opposite end of the spectrum of socially constructed roles for men and women. These constructions or societal expectations are often what motivates individuals to go to the gym, attend University, go on a diet or pursue a spouse. The male and female participants felt they had the same needs and image issues as their able-bodied counterparts. However, for both male and female informants, control over lifestyle choices was often limited by the assistance and support needed to do everyday things. Their options were diminished by forced reliance on financial assistance, special transportation or were made worse when attempting to use the inadequate services naturally available to their able-bodied counterparts. Day-to-day activities often take a person with a disability two or three times longer to complete. The task of getting to the gym to work out often takes longer than the work-out itself. Speed and efficiency are rewarded in our society, especially in the workplace. The ability to make choices regarding their lifestyle and destiny was of great importance for these men and women. The choice of whether or not to participate in sport encompassed many issues related to self-esteem, confidence, financial independence, health, sexuality, and general well-being:

> I think sport offers a lot more than just showing you how to be an athlete and a competitor. It offers so much in the area of confidence and self-esteem and that alone, I think, is enough to keep people in the sport for as long as they do. Once they are actually involved it is easy. It is the getting involved that is the hard part. Some people do not recognize that they have the choice. They do it for rehab or because some doctor told them to do it. (♂)
>
> I buy into the body image thing 100%. The image I choose of myself, because of sports, is more likely to be competent, assertive, independent, sexy and overall more healthy. I think that it is very important to have the healthy body image that is associated with sport. Not like those people who starve themselves, but fit and able. If you think you are able, you look able, and you act able, then you are not disabled. It opens up a whole new range of choices and experiences. (♀)

All of the participants were involved in advocacy for and promotion of programs and systems which support persons with a disability so that others could experience more choice in their lives. Both the men and women felt that control over their bodies, developed through sport and physical activity, had transferred into more control over their choices in other aspects of their lives:

> Being involved has made me more mobile, healthier, and more assertive when it comes to other aspects. I don't take anything off of anyone, on or off the court. I know what I can do, and I expect others to acknowledge my ability and respect my choices. (♂)

Recognition

Societal acceptance of disability sport as "sport" is frequently overshadowed by perceptions of altruism which are often associated with the so called "helping professions." This is due in part to the medical model, which supports the use of physical activity and sport primarily as a means of rehabilitation. Throughout the interviews, the informants stated their deep desire to have their sporting experience recognized as a legitimate sport practice. They wanted to be acknowledged as elite athletes or at least as people who chose to participate in physical activity for the same reasons as did the able-bodied public:

> I don't need you to validate me as an athlete with a disability, but I need you to accept me. I don't need to be validated that I am intelligent or outgoing or sexy or athletic (despite my disability), but I would like people to accept my disability as part of that. (♀)

> I always feel the need to tell people that I am an athlete. I mean I train as hard as they do. Maybe I am paranoid, but I was watching the University swim practice before I got here, and I could not help thinking to myself, "Do they think that I'm just some wheelchair person, watching them do what they think I can't do?" And... I just wanted to go down there and tell them that I am a swimmer too. (♀)

Often the paternalistic arrangement of disability sport or the perception that sport is being "provided" for the athletes, is reflected in a lack of media coverage and by the patronizing type of coverage received. Rather than reporting the national and regional events on the sports page, it is not unusual to find disability sport articles in the human interest section and performances described as inspirational, courageous and unusual. The issues of competition and public awareness were often mentioned with both men and women respondents expressing their frustration over the public perception of disability sport:

> There is not a lot of exposure to disability sport as of yet. I think once exposure becomes more of the norm than it is, once we see it on T.V. more and hear about athletes more, then people will have opportunities to get involved. I don't think that people realize that disabled sport is as accomplished as it is and I think that is one of the problems. (♂)
>
> I don't think people understand or respect the Paralympics in the same way as the Olympics. So, they are not going to get the coverage that they deserve. You know, sport as sport, period. I think it is seen as some sort of really wonderful warm and fuzzy human interest story. I know that before Seoul, I got a lot of exposure, and it was all human interest stories. I wasn't mentioned in the sports section. (♂)

All of the interviewees expressed concern with the way in which disability sport is portrayed by the media. They believed it was less a matter of misinformation, but more the attitude held by the able-bodied public who see "disability" and "sport" as mutually exclusive. Many of the participants felt that further contact with disability sport by the able-bodied public would lead to a better understanding of the disability sport culture. All but one of the participants were for reverse integration, specifically the integration of able-bodied participants into disability sport programs. However, they did not extend that philosophy to the elite disability sport and did not want able-bodied participants competing in the Paralympic Games.

Discussion

The information gleaned from this study provides a number of salient issues to examine in further comparative and relational research in order to lend insight into the interaction of sport, gender, and disability.

This study was not intended to be emancipatory or change producing at the outset. However, as a result of this study, the participants decided to write letters, gather information and develop a support network in order to examine their individual needs and determine how they may bring change to their own sporting environment. I believe the link from research to practice is established because of the theoretical nature of this project, which allows the informants to be active participants in the knowledge production and discussion surrounding the social context of sport. Any strategies for change generated by the participants in their discussions may be termed emancipatory. Lather (1991) points out the dialogic enterprise of emancipatory research:

> Both the substance of emancipatory theory and the process by which that theory comes to "click" with people's sense of the contradictions in their lives are the products of dialectical rather than top-down impositional practices. (p. 59)

Initially, the female informants did not mention experiencing a "role conflict" relative to their athletic behaviour and gender. They subscribed to the "never let them see you sweat" attitude, while enjoying the highs and lows of competition. They felt good about themselves as athletes and did not want the topic of gender to muddy the discussion in the same way that the construct of "disabled" has biassed the public's image of their sport.

When discussing the interaction of gender and disability, the "male attributes" of sport are often used as a reference or comparative model. Sport is described as a means to "overcome" those perceived deficits or limitations brought on by impairment. One female participant tells how sport had become a means to integrate being female, athletic, and disabled:

> I know my experience is different than my male counterparts... it is difficult as an athlete... I love competition, winning and performing, but sport also allows me to get in touch with the physical side of myself. It has allowed a closer relationship with my body. When I was younger my parents did not discuss my disability, but were very supportive of my efforts in sport. But, rather than use it as a way to disguise my disability, I think the competitive experience has taught me to appreciate my body, as it is. (♀)

Interestingly, much of the discussion regarding gender concluded with concepts or comments related to disability. The women in the group talked about their experience as being different from that of their male counterparts, but only to the degree in which they dealt with their disabilities. It became apparent that disability and gender could not be neatly pulled apart and examined in isolation. At the end of the study a literature search was completed to compare pertinent issues in the able-bodied sport literature. However, the comparison is somewhat tenuous since disability is not part of the discussion. The interaction between gender and sport participation in elite able-bodied sport has received considerable attention, but the discussion has been limited to the impact that sport or physical activity, as a male preserve, has had on female participants. This is partly because previous sociological research has used the male participant as the norm, as the typical participant/subject.

One researcher has related feminist theory to marginalization and social roles and extended the discussion to include the impact that sport as a masculine endeavour has had on male participants. Michael Messner's Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity (1992) describes his approach to unravelling the deeply embedded and gendered constructs of malestream physical activity. He begins by acknowledging two of his assumptions. First, sport is not an expression of some biological human need; it is a social institution. Second, rather than defining masculinity as some buried biological essence of manhood, he maintains that it is also socially constructed and tends to vary historically and cross-culturally. He acknowledges that the perceived "role conflict" has more to do with the structure of sport itself, singularly gendered and primarily Western in ideology. His theoretical perspective best illuminates the relationship between developing masculine personalities (in both women and men), and the institution of organized sport. In the following statement, Messner illustrates the difficulty or impossibility of examining one variable in isolation:

> Instead of viewing personality as an onion, with gender identity as the fixed and causal core, it is more accurate to view the personality as a never-completed tapestry, and gender identity as a thread running through the entire weave. Pieces of the tapestry are added as the person interacts with other people within social institutions (family, education, sport, etc). The ways in which the pieces are added and arranged are, in part, shaped by the thread. Yet the thread itself is flexible: it is woven, moved, stretched, rewoven as new pieces of tapestry are added. Rather than viewing gender identity as a "thing" people "have," I conceptualize it as a process of construction that develops, comes into crisis, and changes as a person

> interacts with the (always changing) social world. It thus becomes possible to speak of "gendering" identities, rather than of "masculinity" or "femininity" as relatively fixed identities or social roles. (p. 21)

Of the few studies that included disability in the discussion with gender and physical activity, only one appeared comparable (Henderson & Bedini, 1995). Unlike the present study, Henderson and Bedini specifically examined how women with mobility impairments experienced physical activity and leisure. Similar to the present study, these authors used a methodology which reduced the data to themes that addressed the value of physical activity, attitudes towards one's disability, and participation in physical activity. Although similar issues were revealed such as choice, acceptance by others and self, and recognition; the final analysis was reduced to the participant's ability to adjust to their impairment, relative to "normal" physical activity. All respondents were eventually categorized under three labels: conformers, resisters, and adjusters. Conformers were women who had stopped physical activity and "given in" to the limiting conditions of their disability. Resisters were those who seemingly ignored their disability, even their doctor's orders and continued to participate to their fullest capacity, while adjusters were those that had adapted their previous physical behaviour to continue in mainstream activities, although at a slower pace. One woman described her physical activity involvement as watching her husband jump off the diving board, yet she was labelled an adjustor. Differences in choices are explained relative to the participant's (or non-participant's) ability to adjust to the limitations imposed by the disability.

Difference therefore resides within the individual and the barriers are assumed to be related to the impairment, rather than to the physical activity or sport environment.

In contrast, the present study was a departure from biological and behavioural explanations of difference towards an acknowledgement of socially constructed explanations of difference in choices between genders. The most telling comment for me was at the end of the article when Henderson and Bedini (1995) acknowledged the following:

> The thread that bound these somewhat overlapping themes together related primarily to perceptions of choice. When the women with the mobility impairments were interviewed, they seemed likely to find the most meanings associated with physical activity when they felt they had some options for their involvement. Thus, when choice existed, physical activity was more likely to be like leisure with opportunities to resist constraints that might affect attitudes or limit actual involvement. (p. 159)

Finally, and seemingly from out of nowhere, the authors claim that further understanding of women who are not necessarily *elite athletes* may provide a greater insight into the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual benefits of physical activity. This last statement implies that there is plenty of data which reveals the lived experience of women with disabilities involved in elite sport. I have yet to find one empirical study that deals specifically with that topic.

The model of "malestream" sport, still used in sport sociology, continues to deny the female athlete her experience as her own, unique from that of the male athlete. In future research endeavours examining gender or the woman in sport, we must determine whether the social construction of traditional female and male genders are reinforced by our sporting practices, or our research choices. This includes the use of structural functionalist theory, and epistemological positions which support methodological choices that may constrain the information received. What is still not clear, and should be a topic for further study, is whether the emancipatory nature and attitudes held by this group of athletes were developed after involvement in sport and physical activity or whether this group of men and women were especially empowered due to other life experiences.

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CHAPTER 3

Women, Disability and Sport: Unheard Voices[1]

Introduction

> Disabled women struggle with both the oppression of being women in male-dominated societies and the oppression of being disabled in societies dominated by the able-bodied.
>
> --Susan Wendell

Women with a disability aspiring to high levels of sport competition often face double discrimination associated with disability and gender. The social construction of disability has been influenced by a variety of interrelated factors which restrict the way in which society attaches meaning to disability. Included among these factors are Western society's cultural rules, economics, and political climate. Likewise, the woman with a disability attaches her own meaning relative to the nature of her impairment, her socio-economic status, ethnicity, sexuality, and specific attitudes, experiences, and expectations developed through interactions with others. Having a disability and being in the world of sport are compounded by systemic barriers associated with being female and participating in a male-dominated sport arena.

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The Paralympic Games are the pinnacle of elite competition for athletes with a disability and the second largest sporting event in the world - second only to the Olympic Games. The 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games included 3,100 elite athletes representing over 104 nations, in 33 sporting events.

However, despite the accomplishments of the Paralympic movement, serious inequalities continue to exist for women. Participant numbers have traditionally been skewed, in that two to three times more men than women compete at the Paralympic level (International Paralympic Committee, 1992, 1994; Sherrill, 1993). Professionals within the adapted physical activity field have speculated on the barriers which exist for women with a disability in sport (Sherrill, 1993; Sherrill et al., 1993). These authors suggest that barriers to participation have developed from historical conditions which include: classification systems that are insensitive to women; too few women involved in the power structures of the disability sports movement; and an under-representation of women athletes in wheelchair sport, the latter of which often receives the most attention by the sport media. To date there is little, if any, empirical research which examines the issues and concerns from the perspective of women athletes with a disability.

The purpose of this research was to permit the voice of women athletes with a disability who participate in elite sport to be heard. By illuminating the issues and experiences of the female athlete, we can begin to reveal her view of reality within sport and the context within which she participates. Research of this nature is the first step in the process of identifying and addressing the inequalities and barriers in disability sport facing present and future female athletes.

Gender inequity has been identified in previous work within the able-bodied sport world (Eccles & Harold, 1991; Hall, 1988, 1993; Theberge, 1985). To date, an analysis of issues or barriers for women with a disability involved in sport has not been published. Simply generalizing from able-bodied sport to disability sport, ignores, denies, or erases the significance of women's experiences within a disability sport. Although issues for both groups may be similar, simply accepting current theoretical models of issues for able-bodied athletes (male or female) and applying them to women with a disability negates the experience for all women with disabilities and ignores the historical and political context of their experiences.

In this study, female athletes with a disability are placed at the center of the research as an active agent in the production of knowledge surrounding participatory issues. This basic feminist strategy has been notably successful in history, literature, and anthropology (Stacey & Thorne, 1985). Our objective was not to make generalizations to all women athletes with a disability based on an analysis of a representative sample, rather it was to gather comparative impressions of their experiences as elite athletes.

Five female athletes (informants) who competed at the 1994 Lillehammer Winter Paralympics were interviewed. Each athlete was from a different country within Europe or North America. They were between the ages of 24 and 35 and had been competing in Nordic and alpine skiing from two to 14 years and had a variety of disabilities including: spinal cord injury, brachial plexus paralysis, congenital visual impairment, and lower limb amputation. Participation in this study was voluntary. Each athlete was asked under informed consent and assurance of strict confidentiality to describe her experiences and discuss issues of importance to her in today's sport society and culture. The study was limited to those who used English as their first or second language. The interview framework comprised four open-ended questions related to their initiation, participation, and involvement in elite competitive sport.

Many issues emerged and were captured in over 20 categories relative to context of participation or non-participation in sport. These categories were then collapsed into seven major themes: sport appeal; participatory and competitive opportunities sustaining participation; acceptance of self; acceptance by society; interpersonal support; and institutional support. The following discussion presents a synopsis of each theme, accompanied by an example of the athletes' experiences.

4 According to the athletes, sports that are more appealing to women are not promoted by governing organizations to the same extent as traditionally male oriented sports. Likewise, they felt that sports traditionally popular with able-bodied women were not necessarily the "sport of choice" for women athletes with a disability. As one athlete articulated, "we have a different biology and history; it is wrong to assume that we have the same sport interests and expectations as an able-bodied women athlete." All respondents indicated that their choice to participate in elite sport was influenced by a "hunger" for the challenges and excitement of competition. It was often stated that the disability sport movement, including athletes, should take more responsibility for increasing awareness of the diverse sport opportunities available to women with a disability, in order to make them more appealing to participants.

Participatory and Competitive Opportunities

There was a perceived lack of opportunity for women and girls with a disability at the grassroots level. Most of the athletes noted that their involvement in elite disability sport came later in life, after attempts at involvement in able-bodied sport or when a significant other, already established as an athlete, encouraged them to become involved in sport. Opportunities were rarely presented to them via disability sport organizations and most athletes as children were not aware of organized sport or recreational opportunities.

Sustaining Participation

When these women were provided with sport opportunities they were frequently forced to choose between earning a livelihood and sport. If they selected sport, financial independence was sacrificed which resulted in a reliance on other family members and/or significant others for monetary support. Because of the financial constraints, it was not feasible for them to either employ coaches or receive sport specific training within their community. Therefore, most were self-taught or self-trained in their respective sports.

Two different types of motivational experiences existed for the athletes: intrinsic and extrinsic. Initially, attempts at sport and physical activity were motivated primarily by an outside source, such as family, friends, or a significant other. However, once they began to compete, an intrinsic need began to develop. Many of the women stated that once they became athletes, they found themselves playing numerous roles: as advocate for the disability sports movement and people with a disability; athlete; teacher; and, role-model. Initially, these activities reinforced their participation in sport. Eventually, however, the informants confessed to a more internal incentive, in that the need to compete, win, and express themselves in a physical realm took precedence over other roles. One of the athletes indicated that she had adopted a "no mercy" attitude towards helping other athletes in their development, which allowed her to focus entirely on her own performance.

Acceptance of Self

Acceptance of self, as a female athlete with a disability, took a variety of forms. Whereas two of the athletes felt that accepting their disability gave them the freedom needed to focus on sport and other aspects of their lives, others stated that they perceived themselves as not having a "disability." They felt that accepting society's label of "disabled" implied that they were accepting limitations commonly associated with disability.

Acceptance by Society

Discussion surrounding acceptance often included the concept of normalcy. The athletes stated that one of the reasons many women did not participate in disability sport was a reflection on society in that their activities were not regarded as a "normal" avenue of sport. It was generally perceived that participation in disability sport meant that many women were possibly reinforcing an image of being "different" or "disabled." In order to achieve their respective levels of success the athletes felt that a conception of themselves as "normal" was important for crossing some of the barriers faced by women with disabilities. Most of the athletes felt that society did not perceive disability sport as "normal" or "real" sport. However, all of the athletes felt strongly that with more coverage and promotion of Paralympic events, this perception would eventually change. They also agreed that today's media presented disability sport events more from a human interest angle than as an elite level sports competition.

All of the athletes agreed that the failure of society to recognize them as "athletes" was confirmed in their daily life and interactions with people. For example, they talked of being pitied; of being told they were extremely brave; and, actually being wished "a nice vacation" when preparing to leave for the Lillehammer Paralympic Games.

Interpersonal Support

The athletes indicated that a support network was extremely necessary for participation in elite sport. Each one indicated that if it were not for one influential person in their lives they would not be involved today in their respective sports. Family was one of the most important and significant factors in their choice to participate in sport. A spouse, or significant other, often played a predominant role in persuading the informants to become involved in elite sport and reinforcing their desire to continue in sport. Friends, coaches, and adaptive physical educators (teachers) were also mentioned as important figures.

Institutional Support

Interestingly, the medical profession was not considered part of the athlete's support network. When mentioned, it was usually in a negative context, often as a deterrent from sport participation for women. When sport was promoted by physicians it was viewed solely as a therapeutic tool, with distinct hesitation to challenge the athlete to extend her physical limits.

Within all of the interviews, there appeared a genuine concern about the structure of sports organizations, and resulting decisions made for women athletes with a disability. Sport governing organizations for athletes with a disability were not perceived favorably by athletes. They identified problems with: classification systems; rules and rule changes; unqualified coaches; and, untrained referees and officials. It was felt that sport organizations had been designed for the able-bodied male population, and were not specific for women athletes with a disability. A general feeling among the athletes was that among professionals, limited awareness existed of the interaction between sport and disability. One athlete stated that she had "trained under coaches who were experts in disabilities; coaches who knew much about sport; but she had yet to have a coach with the combined knowledge."

Based on their experiences, the educational system was reported as largely responsible for limiting their participation in sport. Generally, their physical education teachers lacked knowledge and experience in integrating students with disabilities into the traditional curriculum. They indicated that the views of their teachers toward their disability were pessimistic and that modifications of activities were rarely if ever attempted. When involved, their "participation" in sport was in the capacity of time-keepers, score-keepers or observers. This learned helplessness was reinforced by the medical profession who provided written excuses prohibiting participation in physical activity and physical education classes. All of these combined factors resulted in a self-fulfilling prophecy, with these women unable to perform the requisite skills needed to participate in a variety of sports and physical activity later in life.

Future Directions and Recommendations

The foregoing issues are symptomatic of a broader spectrum of issues pertaining to the involvement of women in disability sport. Why is it that women's issues are becoming more salient, recognized, respected, and acted upon in the able-bodied sport world and non-sport world, and not in disability sport? Based on the experiences of these authors and informants, the main limiting factors include: sheer lack of numbers of female athletes and administrators (less voices); few avenues of expression for the female athlete with a disability; societal assumptions relative to disability and sport; and inertia from the effect of traditional expectations of being both disabled and female.

A lack of representation of women, both as athletes and as administrators, in disability sport continues to hamper efforts at increasing awareness of issues unique to the female athlete with a disability. Systemic support for the female athlete must be identified, increased, and reinforced by the governing bodies of the disability sport movement. This support includes sensitivity to financial, time, and cultural constraints specifically experienced by women with a disability who have little institutional or interpersonal backing in general. Failure to sustain the participation of today's female athlete with a disability will result in a decrease in participation numbers tomorrow.

Empowering the female athlete to be an active participant in the process of advocacy and promotion of disability sport is difficult unless there are opportunities provided for female athletes to unite, share, and validate their experiences. There needs to be feasible avenues for the female athlete to address her concerns to the decision-makers. This might encourage a united political front that could represent all female athletes, regardless of disability label, or sport affiliation.

In order to counteract societal assumptions of disability and sport, exposure must become a top priority for organizers of sporting events and competition. The media should continually be pressured to report the sport story rather than the human interest story. An emphasis must be placed on educating physical educators, coaches, and decision-makers of sports organizations as to the benefits associated with sport for people with disabilities. Likewise, the disability sport movement must develop standards for training and certifying coaches, trainers, and sport officials.

Finally, if disability sport is to continue to flourish, we must continually examine the barriers that exist for marginalized groups such as women athletes. Double jeopardy exists for the athlete who is both female and disabled which warrants attention by professionals, academics, and feminists in sport. There exists in our global society, a moral obligation to continue to highlight the experience and most importantly to bring the voice of the female athlete with a disability to the public consciousness. This is particularly important in view of the inherent physiological and psychological value of sport to people with disabilities.

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has identified the issue of representation of women in the Paralympic movement as one of its highest priorities. Toward this end, the IPC Sport Science Sub-Committee is supporting initiatives to institute a line of feminist research in this area. This study provided the initial data for three additional studies currently being completed on women, disability and sport. It seems the Paralympic movement is starting to listen to voices previously unheard.

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CHAPTER 4

Participation in Elite Disability Sport by the Female Athlete

Introduction

In the last forty years, a relatively low profile competitor has entered the elite sport arena. The recognized pinnacle of sporting achievement, the Olympics, has been linked with a sport forum, the Paralympics, that according to Landry (1992), exhibits values similar to those identified with Olympism. Paralympism has evolved to encompass the ideals present in Pierre de Coubertin's vision: the pursuit of excellence in sport, fair play, rejection of discrimination, promotion of mutual respect, and cooperation and peace between individuals and nations (Landry, 1992).

Maintaining these ideals in the administration of elite disability sport has proven to be complicated. In a past edition of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) Magazine, President Robert Steadward concluded his discussion of the various issues confronting and perceived barriers facing the Paralympic movement by stating "the IPC is a body of complexities, and sometimes we are overwhelmed with perceptions of diversity" (Steadward, 1995). In 1995 an IPC Task Force was charged with providing strategies to address various issues facing the Paralympic Movement relative to development and growth. Although this Task Force did not give specific recommendations related to increasing equity among athletes, the following statement was made in the report:

> The IPC reaffirms its commitment to include in the Summer and Winter Paralympic Programmes sports events for athletes with more severe disability and female athletes. (IPC Task Force, 1996, p. 30)

Interestingly, the IPC Task Force made no formal statement regarding "how" this would be done or "why" it should reaffirm this commitment.

Additionally, the process of including more athletes with severe disabilities is different, both sociologically and practically, than including more female athletes. For example, the inclusion of athletes with severe disabilities requires developing more events in which only athletes with severe disabilities can participate. To this end, the IPC has included events such as quad rugby and boccia. However, the lack of participant numbers sometimes results in the cancellation of those events at World and Paralympic Games. The inclusion of more athletes with severe disabilities would require the development of new classification systems, the adaptation of individual sports to increasingly diverse grades of disability and a redefinition of what is traditionally viewed as "elite sport" in the Paralympic Movement. Moreover, a new conceptual definition would have to be developed to clarify those characteristics associated with the term "severe disability."

On the other hand, the adaptation of events and classification systems would be minimal to facilitate the inclusion of more women in the Paralympic Games. Likewise, a commitment to gender equity does not immediately involve value-based changes to the elite sport system, nor does it require the development of an operational definition that would distinguish between male and female athletes. By combining the two issues in one statement the IPC Task Force has obviously not examined the issue of equity critically enough. Perhaps the Task Force was concerned with taking a "politically correct" position. It was interesting to note that the Task Force was careful not to use the pronouns "he" and "she" in any of its statements or recommendations. However, given the attention to language equity, it is revealing that the only other reference to equity is in the rather benign comment at the end of the Executive Summary:

> Throughout this report, any reference made to an individual in the male gender is not intended to be discriminatory and, obviously, also applies to the female gender. It must be understood that this is done for the sake of expediency only. (IPC Task Force, 1996, p. 4)

As the IPC Task Force has a stated commitment to gender equity, it is perplexing that the preceding two statements were the sole indication of that commitment in the final report. Considering the complexity and diversity of issues facing the IPC, it is evident that further examination is needed to effectively address equity issues and provide recommendations which can be acted upon quickly.

The constitution of the IPC states that as a governing body, it will promote sports for athletes with disabilities without discrimination for political, religious, economic, sex or racial reasons, and further, that it will seek expansion of the opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in sports (International Paralympic Committee, 1994a). In other words, the opportunity to participate at the elite sport level is a constitutionally supported opportunity afforded to all elite level athletes with disabilities.

Despite this mandate, a clear discrepancy exists between the participation rates of male and female athletes at the Paralympic Games and World Championships, as evidenced by participation numbers that show two to three times more men competing than women (International Paralympic Committee, 1992; 1994b; Sherrill, 1993a; 1997). According to Wendell (1993) this should not be a surprise, since women with a disability who aspire to high levels of sport competition often face double discrimination related to biology and disability, along with the traditional barriers that exist when participating in the male dominated sports world (Messner, 1994; DePauw, 1994). As stated in chapter 3, adapted physical activity scholars have speculated on the barriers that exist for women in disability sport (DePauw, 1994; Grimes & French, 1987; Sherrill, 1993b; Sherrill, 1997). Some of the barriers reported in the literature include classification systems that are not sensitive to women, too few women involved in the power structure of the disability sports movement, and an under-representation of women athletes in wheelchair sport (which often receives the most attention by the able-bodied media). At the last Winter Paralympic Games, a study was undertaken which examined the participatory issues of the female athlete competing in elite Winter Paralympic sport (Chapter 3 - Olenik, Matthews, & Steadward, 1995). The intent of the Lillehammer study was to gain insight into the barriers female athletes face relative to their participation. Although small in scope, this qualitative study highlighted some of the issues which are analysed in more detail in the present project. Important participatory issues expressed by these athletes include:

- a perceived lack of competitive opportunities,
- a lack of acceptance by society of their sport,

- a lack of awareness of their needs on the part of the sport system, and
- a need to validate their experiences either with other athletes or other women.

Similarly, the present study moves beyond the speculation on barriers that limit women's participation, to focussing on the experiences of women who are successful participants in elite sport. According to Boutilier & San Giovanni (1983), a qualitative approach enables researchers, together with informants-participants, to explore and describe "women's ways of knowing," ways of ascertaining and verifying truth in the domain of sport. As there exists little cumulative knowledge and scholarly information regarding the socializing agents which influence participation by women in elite disability sport, more first-hand knowledge is needed. Moreover, to understand women in disability sport adequately, the social context in which the activity occurs must be taken into consideration. Increasing the involvement of female athletes may depend on the sport system's ability to reproduce or increase the circumstances in which women choose to participate. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the participatory issues of the elite female athlete in the disability sport context and to provide a forum where the perceptions of this athlete may be considered.

Theoretical Context

In this study, "Elite Disability Sport and the Female Athlete," a critical theoretical approach is taken. It is my intent to interpret the data, with the aim of providing knowledge or information that might influence further research on the social world of elite disability sport. I believe that inquiry is not value-free and that advocacy is one of the primary aims of my research. An underlying assumption of the research is the belief that a better understanding of the mechanisms operating in the world of the female athlete can lead to the emancipation of elite disability sport from constraints similar to those historically associated with the elite able-bodied sports (e.g., gender inequity, sport preferential treatment, and commercialism) (Gruneau, 1991).

Ontological Perspective

In this research style, the social reality of the informant is tangible. It is moulded, formed, and developed by a series of economic, political, social, cultural, ethnic, and gender variables or factors. For all practical purposes, these structures are assumed to be "real," a consequence of time and place (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Epistemological Perspective

Informants and researchers are seen as creative, adaptive people, who have internalized definitions of situations as a result of living in a given society. Informants and researchers are interactively linked, with the values of both influencing the research process. One way to provide the insight and information needed to address inequities in disability sport is to examine the representation, or lived experience, of the elite female athlete without an *a priori* hypothesis. This study examines the sport world in which the female athlete with a disability functions and identifies those experiences, or "defining moments," which lead to her involvement and sustainment as an elite athlete. The research paradigm which informed this approach was primarily one of critical theory (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A basic assumption of critical theory is the "intent" to cause change, or to become an enabling, motivating resource for its participants. According to Fay (1987), the humanist approach to critical theory simultaneously explains the social world, takes a critical look, and empowers the reader to overthrow it. Therefore, the resulting theory should be critical and practical at the same time. Realizing that I could not identify those women who wished to participate in elite disability sport but did not, I chose instead to examine the salient issues of those who do participate. This was done with the intent of providing recommendations which will reinforce or sustain their involvement and heighten the awareness of those circumstances identified as deterrents to elite sport involvement.

Informant Selection

Over 40 female athletes involved in elite disability sport from Canada, U.S., and Western Europe were randomly identified through the sport governing organizations and contacted regarding their possible participation in this project. Of those athletes, 36 agreed to participate, and 20 were chosen, based on regional representation. Further criteria for this purposeful sampling approach were: desire of informant to participate, geographical accessibility and logistical concerns, and ability of the informant to communicate in English. Informants were sent a participant information sheet (Appendix F) prior to the interview, explaining the purpose of the research and a description of the interview process. Additionally, an informed consent form was signed and confidentiality was guaranteed (Appendix G).

Descriptive statistics of the sample including age, sport involvement, country of origin, disability type, life status relative to partners and children, education and employment, appear in the following table.

Table 4-1

Descriptive Statistics of Informants: The Elite Female Athlete

Demographic	**Statistic**
Sex	20 women
Age Range	20-43
Sport Status	12 Competing at elite level 8 Retired from elite level
Country of Origin	9 Canada 8 USA 3 Western Europe
Disability	7 with Spinal Cord Injury 7 with Cerebral Palsy 3 with Amputation 1 with Spina Bifida 1 with Visual Impairment 1 Les Autrés
Sports	11 Track & Field 3 Basketball 3 Swimmers 2 Skiers 1 Cyclist
Life Status	11 Lifetime Partner or Married 7 Never Married 2 Divorced 5 with Children
Education	12 High School Equivalency 8 University Degrees
Employment Status	14 Employed (2 Self-Supporting) 4 Not Employed 2 Students

Method

A combination of data collection methods were employed, including use of in-depth interviews, descriptive statistics, and documenting of researcher observations (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & McCormack-Steinmetz, 1991). Whenever possible, I spent "down time" with the informants, doing ordinary tasks (i.e., shopping, eating, and watching them train). All of the interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the athlete, in either her home, office, or a neutral location (e.g. restaurant, park). Being in a familiar place and free from scheduling pressures, allowed the athlete to be more at ease with the interview process. This is an alternative to interviewing at Paralympic Games, sporting events, or in the researcher's domain. Collecting data during a sporting event, although convenient (since all of the informants are in one place), is an encroachment on the athlete's training and preparation time and/or athletic focus. Although research in the field often calls for observation of the "lived experience," this can be intrusive on the lives of informants. There are also interpretive issues such as: does the athlete have the time, focus, and energy to reflect and articulate her interview responses? This intrusion may also show academic arrogance on the part of the researcher when he or she expects the athlete's attention to be on the research, rather than his or her training or performance.

Individual interviews consisted of questions designed to probe the four basic thematic areas outlined in the introduction to this project/dissertation. Specifically, questions centered on motivation, participation and involvement, initiation into and separation from elite competitive sport (Appendix H). A research journal was kept to record observations and details not readily apparent on the transcripts and to highlight points in the discussion where the participants seemed to attach great emotional or social significance. This is a recognized procedure to ensure trustworthiness of data and to provide an account of the research and analysis process (Ely et al., 1991; Patton, 1990).

Follow-up phone interviews were used to check content validity and, after initial analysis, to provide context-specific descriptions of the emerging themes. In addition, after the first iteration of data, a second interview was completed with a sub-group of three informants to verify the authenticity of my interpretation. These interviews were also done to avoid a mechanistic response to issues of validity. Seidman (1991) warns of this pitfall:

> On occasion I see dissertations in which doctoral candidates are as mechanical about establishing an "audit trail" or devising methods of "triangulation" as those in my generation who dutifully devised procedures to confront "instrument decay" and "experimental mortality." What are needed are not formulaic approaches to enhancing either validity or trustworthiness but understanding and respect for the issues that underlie those terms. (p. 19)

After transcribing the interview tapes, my initial analysis consisted of the electronic cut and paste technique described in the first study (Chapter 2) and outlined in Appendix B. However, it became apparent that the research process led to using different interpretation and reporting techniques. The overriding characteristic of this type of research is flexibility. Interpreting and analysing were processes that occurred throughout the project, just as labelling, categorizing, and the crafting of themes were performed throughout the data collection (Seidman, 1991). It was only in the final thematic analysis that I examined the meaning that I attached to the research. What was the experience like? How did I understand it, make sense of it, see linkages in it? It is at this point that connections among events, structures, roles and social forces which operated in the lives of the athletes appeared, and were verified by the participants.

Results

Similar to other qualitative projects of this type, the resulting data are broad in scope. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, prior assumptions were acknowledged and a concerted effort was made to allow the data to emerge from the research process and not be confined to preconceived theoretical or pragmatic conclusions reported in the disability sport literature. As anticipated, the pilot to this study, Women, Disability and Sport: Unheard Voices (Chapter 3) provided information which guided the interview process. Because of the similarities in both the method and the means of interpretation, it was reasonable to also use the pilot study as a means of comparison. It must be noted, however, that the pilot study related the experiences of only five athletes and the interviews were conducted to elicit responses to four specific questions related to involvement in disability sport. These responses were then summarized by the researchers; however, a systematic analysis of themes was not attempted. The purpose of the former research was to illuminate the issues and experiences of the female athlete to provide a basis for future inquiry.

Besides this research effort, there have been relatively few studies which have focussed on the female athlete participating in elite disability sport and even fewer with a similar theoretical orientation. When gender is included as a variable, it is generally housed within a larger study relative to predetermined social constructs such as self-regard of wheelchair athletes (Sherrill, Silliman, Gench, & Hinson, 1990), self-regard of blind athletes (Sherrill, Gench, Hinson, Gilstrap, Richir, & Mastro, 1990) and self-esteem of athletes with cerebral palsy (Sherrill & Rainbolt, 1986). All of these studies compared survey-based scores of male and female subjects in an attempt to find statistical differences. In all three studies gender-based differences existed, however, the mechanisms that account for those differences were not explored. Nor was there an attempt to examine the way in which the survey questions may have produced gendered responses relative to the way individual athletes express notions of self-esteem and self-regard.

Because of these theoretical and methodological differences between the above three studies and this work, a comparison of the results with the present study was not warranted. Still, it is useful to compare and contrast the results of at least one related study in order to validate the reader's response to my informants' assertions. An extensive literature review was done to produce relevant articles that approached the topic with a like methodology and theoretical underpinnings. Because of these inconsistencies, any comparisons are nebulous at best. Nonetheless, two studies were chosen for comparison because of this general similarity in purpose and intent. Both studies started with the underlying assumption that "physical activity," whether sport or recreational, is beneficial for women. The first study, "Physical Activity Patterns of Physically Disabled Women in Canada," was completed by E. Jane Watkinson and Karen Calzonetti in 1989. This study examined the involvement of women with a physical disability in various physical activity opportunities provided by Canada's physical activity delivery system. These opportunities encompassed everything from swimming to gardening. Similar to the present study, the initiation process and socialization into physical activity of these women was examined. In contrast to the present study, Watkinson and Calzonetti distributed a survey instrument consisting of closed ended questions to individuals associated with a disabled sport organization or generic disability association. The questionnaire was used to gain information about the respondents' attitudes toward activity, including information on factors that might increase the level of activity by women with disabilities. Analysis was limited to a tabulation of responses and percentage-score reporting.

The second study, "Sport Participation and Women's Personal Empowerment: Experiences of the College Athlete," was completed in 1993 by Elaine M. Blinde, Diane E. Taub, and Lingling Han and it examined the gender-role socialization of able-bodied women in collegiate sport. Although the participants did not have disabilities, the intent and structure of this work is closer to the format of this thesis than the project undertaken by Watkinson and Calzonetti. In the Blinde et al. study, sport was seen as a means of empowerment or disempowerment of the female athlete. Telephone interviews were conducted with 24 past or present female athletes, and rather than targeting specific outcomes of sport in their questioning, the researchers allowed the athletes' responses to guide the analyses. The authors state that they employed the use of summary sheets which were developed from the interviews. Each researcher then used the summary sheets as an evaluative and comparative tool. It should be noted that the person(s) conducting the phone interviews were not necessarily directly involved in the interpretation. Results were reported relative to the athlete's perception of self and the researchers summarized this information into three main outcomes of sport participation. These themes reflected personal empowerment and were labelled "bodily competence," "perceptions of a competent self," and "a proactive approach to life." Also of interest was that, despite the multitude of transcripts and information that would have been produced, the authors chose to summarize the athlete's responses and included relatively few lines of text from the transcripts supporting their interpretations. In order to provide some comparative measure to the present study, those results which directly relate to the outcome of this study are mentioned in the following section.

As summarized in Table 4-2, the following results represent those situations or conditions relative to the female athletes' initiation into, sustainment in, and deterrent from elite disability sport.

Table 4-2

Initiation, Sustainment and Deterrent to Sport Involvement: The Elite Female Athlete

Initiation	**Sustainment**	**Deterrent**
Family	Thrill of Competition	Lack of communication with administration
Previous sport involvement prior to onset of disability	Self-satisfaction	Lack of information
Unintentional (by "accident")	Social relationships in sport	Conflicting information
Peers and friends with disabilities	Improves overall quality of life	No role models
		No voice
		Lack of competitive opportunities
		No support (trainers, coaches, finances, etc.)

Initiation into Sport

The entry into sport for these athletes took a variety of forms. There was no typical age of entrance, no specific sport that garnered interest, and no immediate connection with a role model or mentor in sport or recreation. Informants were socialized into the sport environment through the following avenues: family, previous sport involvement, unintentionally, or through other friends or peers with disabilities. This is in contrast with Watkinson and Calzonetti (1989) who reported that nearly 40% of their respondents felt personally responsible for their initiation into physical activity.

Many of the athletes in the present study saw their initiation into elite disability sport as an accident, completely unintentional, and without forethought:

> I got involved totally by accident. I didn't know that I really had a disability, until I got involved in adapted sport. I didn't know it existed, until someone asked me at the community pool, why didn't I try Blind sport?

Additionally, nearly all of the informants credited their family with providing the impetus for their initial involvement in competitive sport. Many stated that they had "come from a sport family," that they had brothers and/or sisters who were involved in sport, so it was a natural choice:

> My mom has always been really supportive of me. She never put any limitations on me and believed sport was a good way for me to express myself. I know she had to talk to the teachers to allow me to participate, and to let me set my own limits, and not to put any limits on me. She taught me to try anything, but if I said that I couldn't do something, to be respected. But, I would try anything, any sport.
>
> I have had access to sport, but only because of my parent's support and just the person that I am. I feel like I have sport, because I created it in my life. But, it was something that was never like the awareness of what was really out there. I didn't even know about the sport organizations and only found out by accident, through another friend with a disability.

Likewise, the athletes with acquired disabilities had been involved in sport before the onset of disability. A natural propensity for athletics seemed to exist prior to their accident, and often they used sport as means to lessen the impact of the disability on their lifestyle:

> I loved sport when I was very young, I always wanted to be a sprinter. At my Catholic school, it was not proper for a young lady to wear shorts, so there was no running, no sprinting, no track, and I would climb the fence at night and sneak over to the boy's school and run on their track. I qualified for the Tokyo Olympics eventually, and three weeks before we were to leave, I lost my leg in a car accident. I fought back, though and sport remained and still is my life.

Familial connections and a natural propensity to be involved in sport was also reported in the Lillehammer study (Olenik et al., 1995), but again differs from the results of Watkinson and Calzonetti (1989), whose respondents ranked family extremely low as a socializing agent.

More revealing than what the athletes disclosed about their initiation into sport is what they didn't describe. None of these athletes were socialized into sport through their school physical education program, nor were they contacted, recruited, or approached by a disability sport organization. Also of interest, was that some of the athletes claimed that the medical profession had actually dissuaded them from entering sport or recreational activities. These athletes felt that the medical profession understood the use of sport as a means of rehabilitation, but that elite athleticism and the highly competitive environment was not included in this perspective. Although Watkinson and Calzonetti (1989) were not using the elite disability sport context when asking about initiation into physical activity, they found that the medical profession was a socializing agent for 32% of their survey participants.

Sustaining Sport Involvement

Sport involvement at the elite level is often difficult to maintain, whether able-bodied or with a disability. Elite athleticism requires commitment, focus, and sacrifice. Athletics is the vehicle to experience elite sport, but to be an athlete requires much more than just taking part in sport. The primary agents of support in sustaining this level of involvement with my informants were the thrill of competition, a satisfaction with the self-actualization earned through sport, the social experiences gained through participation, and the general improvement in overall quality of life. Similar participation outcomes were reported in Blinde et al. (1993), who found that an increased health consciousness and positive perceptions of body competence sustained the involvement of able-bodied female athletes. Watkinson and Calzonetti (1989) also reported that respondents participated primarily to "feel better," for pleasure and for the benefits of overall fitness. Below is an example of the internalization of the sport experience from the present study:

> It is within me. It is a revenge against everybody, it was a way to prove that all that I said in all those years, that I was the best sprinter. I would never take no for an answer. So there was no other choice, I made a choice that I was going to run again, I made the choice that I was going to feel better, I made the choice that I was going to win again. Those choices sustain me through all of the disappointments. I am here because I want to be and no one can take this away from me.

Attributes gained in sport were often mentioned as reasons for overall success experienced in life. In comparison, Blinde et al. (1993) emphasized the enabling aspects of the body or self-empowerment through sport reported by the informants. When asked to describe themselves, the most commonly used descriptors were committed, competitive, disciplined, outgoing, caring and, of course, an athlete:

> It has taught me a lot. Especially socially, just meeting with people, interacting. Everything that I have done has kind of fed off of each other. I have been fortunate that most of the things that I have learned in sport, I have been able to use that experience in so many areas of my life. I believe my success in sport has sort of translated into success in career and relationships.

Often a combination of factors sustained the athletes' involvement. When asked if there were any negative implications to their involvement in sport, athletes could not relate anything negative to their athleticism. According to Blinde et al. (1993), the risk and challenge present in the sport environment reinforces the need for self-efficacy among able-bodied athletes. Likewise, Olenik et al. (1995) reported that the informants hold internal incentives related to a need to compete, win, and express themselves in the physical realm, regardless of success or failure. In the present study, despite deterrents such as access to competition or attitudinal obstacles, the desire to participate in sport remained intact:

> I do everything I can to stay in it, keep competing. I even use a lot of visualization, psyching up techniques and fantasy. But, also to put it into perspective, that this isn't win or lose, or whether it meets others expectations. The only expectation that I have is knowing that I gave it everything I had. Absolutely everything. That there is absolutely nothing left in me at the end of a race. And, whether I win or lose, I can live with that. I have tons of passion around it, and that is what I really want to eventually give back and give away to others.

Deterrents Affecting Elite Sport Participation

All of these women participate in or have participated successfully in elite sport. However, their sport achievements and decision to compete at the elite level required a tremendous amount of effort and purpose. Most of the perceived deterrents to sport participation were related to frustration with the sport organization, a lack of competitive opportunity, and the inability to conduct themselves as athletes, yet still have a "voice" in the sport administering body.

Playing the role of athlete was often difficult when also trying to fill the other sport-related roles such as coach, mentor, and fund raiser:

> It is getting to be a lot of work. Trying to not only play basketball, but also help organize it, coach other players, fund raising and all of that. It was just like, we have done this for so many years, I'm tired. I was ready to stop it all.
>
> We just don't share enough information with other teams. What is going on? There are women that are playing on men's teams. There was a couple of them at the tournament. It is like, you know, are there no disabled women in your town, or no organization, or why isn't there a team there? Do they just not want to play on women's teams? There is no process or system in place to bring women together to compete... it is almost a fluke that we occasionally manage to get together.

The majority of the informants felt that they could not effect change or do anything significant to impact the decisions and policy being made at the national or international level:

> I believe that an athlete doesn't necessarily make a better administrator. But, there are a lot of people who are not disabled, who are taking advantage of people with a disability and some of the simple things that we are not able to express to the administration, are ignored. I think many of them (administrators) do it because it gives them an opportunity to make money, travel and have power over something.
>
> I was very upset at one point, because I was asking for a piece of equipment to train. I had to go to the monthly Board Members' Meeting to ask, and work at Bingo every week. Anyway, after the meeting, they went to the bar, and of course the tab was paid by the association and that one particular day they had refused us the piece of equipment. But, after the meeting they met in the bar, and the tab was more than the cost of the equipment. I know it is not a very nice thing to say, but I do believe those able bodied were taking advantage of the disabled. I mean I asked about it and they said that it was not my place to complain.

Blinde et al. (1993) assert that the athletes in their study realize the importance of remaining active rather than passive if they want to change or impact sport development. It is generally accepted that the development of women's sport would not exist without the active involvement of the athletes. Many frustrating examples of mismanagement and poor coaching were related. Although these experiences may not seem unusual at first, what is unique is that these athletes had no recourse when mistreated, misinformed, or denied basic support. The following comments echoed those made in the 1995 study by Olenik et al., in which athletes stated that sport organizations were designed for the administrative body rather than the athlete, or at the very least, for the wheelchair male population.

> Things went really bad at the Paralympics. I couldn't deal with it, I mean I did not know what was going on. My coach didn't really prepare me for the stress of the Games, and when I arrived there was no one to tell me where I should be or what to expect at the event. I feel like the only reason I won a silver medal is because two of the women from other countries, knew less than I did, and they were disqualified for cutting in too early. I didn't even call my Mom when I won. I stayed in my room and cried all night. What was really weird, was that I was sharing a room with one of the coaches, and she did not say a word to me. I couldn't deal with the huge disappointment I felt. I tell people that I received a silver medal. I still can't bring myself to say that I really won it. It wasn't close to my best time.
>
> So when I didn't make the team, I wasn't surprised. All the letter said was that I didn't make the team. Also, he (coach) made his own comment that he really thought that my priorities had changed as an athlete, that I wasn't committed and he really let me have it personally. It devastated me, there was nothing about my race times, or the criteria for the choice not to include me. It was entirely subjective. Really, at that time in my career, I had no idea what sort of times were necessary to make the team.

One drawback of being an elite athlete in a relatively new sporting forum (Paralympic Sport) is the lack of role-models or previous performances to emulate or imitate. In Olenik et al. (1995), a general lack of awareness of competitive opportunities was reported by the athletes. In the present study, the athletes expressed the isolation they felt, not only from their peers with disabilities who were not at this level, but also from the social world of elite sport in general (e.g., Olympic Sport).

> In my event, I really have no point of reference. No one to talk to about training or to watch. I often feel really alone. I mean sometimes I find myself trying to help someone else, mentoring and stuff. But, there was really never a role model for me, no one I could relate to. Only able-bodied athletes and able-bodied coaches.

By themselves these examples may seem easily surmountable, but in combination they result in a sport playing field that is difficult to navigate. When competing at this elite level very little energy is left over to advocate, mentor, or protest decisions made for the athlete themselves. Furthermore, empowering athletes to take responsibility for their sport experience will not happen until the sport governing bodies choose to construct sport **with** the athletes, rather than **for** them.

Discussion

A comprehensive framework for achieving equity for the female athlete in disability sport cannot be developed without acknowledging the agency/structure dichotomy. Based on the information gleaned in this study and in later discussion with the informants, a series of recommendations was developed, related to involvement of the female athlete in elite disability sport. It is important to realize, however, that the words "opportunity to participate" can have many different meanings for different groups, cultures, and countries. To be genuine in my attempt to address equity issues, I had to acknowledge the scope of practices, belief systems, and lived experiences of those who operate within the social world of disability sport. This included the lived experiences of athletes and their perceptions of the sport structures which impact on their decision making.

Only a few research studies have addressed gender issues within the context of participation in disability sport. Professionals in the field have recently acknowledged the importance of rigorous examination of gender issues (DePauw, 1994; Sherrill, 1993a; Kolkka & Williams, 1997). The limited research so far has not questioned the social structure or system in which the athlete operates (Williams, 1994), but instead asks the reader to observe the athlete (the subject of the research) as an individual who needs to "adapt" to the sporting environment. Basic to this approach is the assumption that "equal opportunity" naturally exists for women with a disability, and by better adapting their behaviour and needs to the social context of disability sport, their participation numbers will automatically increase. Interestingly, when interviewing these athletes, a conceptualization of the issue emerged which challenges the functionalist assumptions made in previous research. A statement from one informant illustrates this point:

> I don't know why, at this point, we should work to increase the numbers of female athletes in Paralympic Sport. I would not wish my experiences and the conflict and confusion that has resulted from my participation on anyone, male or female. We should try and better understand what is happening on the field first, before we recruit more women.

Considering the complexity of the issue, and acknowledging that the experiences of the male and female athlete are different, it would be advantageous to develop a conceptual framework that allows for diversity and mutual understanding between the sport system and the athlete. One small step toward a deeper understanding of this issue would be to call for the development of equity in disability sport opportunities, rather than equality. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (1994) defines "equity" and "equality" as follows:

Equality: of the same quantity, size, number, degree, value, intensity and having the same rights privileges, ability and rank.

Equity: justice, impartiality, the giving or desiring to give each person his or her due; anything that is fair.

The promotion of equity within the Paralympic Movement will allow us to respect the individual differences between our athletes and provide opportunities more practically suited to their needs. Equality, on the other hand, assumes that athletes share a homogeneity of experience| one which the sport system naturally meets. I urge professionals and researchers in the field to consider the implications of promoting either equity or equality and the assumptions grounded in a research project or administrative mandate simply to increase the numbers of female athletes.

When addressing inequity it is necessary first to understand the needs and intentions of the participants in the social world being studied. An easy assumption to make is that "gender," like "disability," implies a homogeneity of experience among women and between women with a disability. Based on my research, I found little homogeneity in this group. However, regardless of cultural, religious, socioeconomic and value-based differences, it is apparent throughout the interviews that sport profoundly influences the life-choices that these women make. When asked to define themselves, most women began with statements regarding a "deep commitment" to sport and an "intense desire to excel," or to "perfect themselves as athletes." All of the women interviewed felt that this commitment and desire translated into success in other areas of their lives (e.g., relationships, career, etc.). Also of significance is the shared frustration these athletes feel in regard to their respective sport systems. Although discrepancies and specific discriminatory practices are revealed, for the purposes of this paper I am focussing on three universal discrepancies noted by the participants.

Initiation of the Female Athlete

According to these athletes, there is a lack of opportunity for developing one's athletic potential at the elite level. This may take the form of few competitive opportunities, little assistance from sport professionals educated in both sport and disability or a lack of shared information across sport organizations or between sport officials and athletes.

There is a lack of awareness about opportunities for participation in sport for young women with disabilities. None of the participants in the study credited their sport organization or any disability sport organization as the socializing agent which caused them to become involved in sport. During their initial sport experience, most were unaware of the existence of disability sport organizations.

Better networking may be a possible way to remedy the situation. National Sport Organizations (NSOs) for athletes with disabilities should develop more active educational and recruitment practices which focus on identifying future female athletes. Since most participants were first involved in the able-bodied sport environment, NSOs should work to build better communication and cooperation with those organizations. More information and educational materials should also be made available to school systems for use in physical education and activity classes. Finally, NSOs should identify and work more closely with other organizations, such as disability sport camps and universities, which offer adapted physical activity programs and disability sport opportunities, in order to recruit those young women already active in a recreational or educational environment.

Sustainment of the Female Athlete

The informants cited their love of sport, the thrill of competition and the intrinsic need to express themselves in a very physical and competitive forum as the main motivations that sustained their involvement in elite sport. If we as professionals want to reproduce the sporting environment which addresses this need we will have to quit "selling" sport to the able-bodied public as a means to overcome disability. In a recent article on movement and its implication for individuals with disabilities the value of sport participation was discussed:

> There is little doubt that sport and related movement activities contribute in many ways to the lives of individuals with disabilities. Through their active participation in physical activity, individuals with disabilities contribute much to our general understanding of movement and its meaning. We see, for example, courageous examples of individuals overcoming major life obstacles (disability) to accomplish what many take for granted. (Dunn & Sherrill, 1996, p. 387)

I argue that this is a socially constructed meaning grafted on to the athlete with a disability by the able-bodied public, or in this case researcher, which produces a disability sport narrative centered on disability rather than sport. The meaning that the informants in this study attached to their sport involvement is denied by the above script. The denial of meaning attached to sport by athletes was also evidenced in the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games when event organizers chose the theme "Triumph of the Human Spirit" over protests from the athletes who felt it focussed too much on overcoming disability rather than on athleticism and sport.

Along with better communication and understanding between athlete and sport organization, the cancellation of events, games and tournaments must be addressed. Female athletes are twice as likely to have their event cancelled due to lack of numbers than are their male counterparts (Sherrill, 1997). This is partly because there is little if any communication between the International Sport Organizations (IOSDs) on the numbers of female participants in events, classes and countries. Likewise, most female athletes are unaware of their counterparts in other sport organizations, countries, and events. Nearly all of the participants stated that they approached international competitions unaware of who their competitors would be or the level of competition they would face. If more information was shared and reported, cancellation of events would be less likely. Research combining both feminist theory and demographics, as cited in the introduction to this dissertation (McDaniel, 1996), would be useful in addressing this issue.

Deterrents to Participation for the Female Athlete

All of the athletes expressed a need for better representation in the world of their sport and a higher profile of female athletes within the Paralympic Movement. There is a shortage of images with which young women in disability sport can identify. Media coverage and education materials are dominated by wheelchair sport which generally portrays the male athlete. Possible avenues for recourse may include mandated practices similar to those initiated by United States legislation such as Title IX, or the Americans with Disabilities Act. The IPC and the Paralympic Organizing Committees should institute practices which ensure equitable representation of women, events, and countries in all of their media and promotional materials. The IPC and the Paralympic Organizing Committees should promote "the authentic female athlete" when developing promotional materials, commercials, or educational materials. This athlete should be identifiable by her athleticism and not her ability to overcome her "disability." The importance of this is illustrated by the impact athletes such as Florence Griffiths-Joyner, Mary Lou Retton, Silken Laumann and Nadia Comenici have made in able-bodied sport. These athletes are not portrayed as women who overcame their "gender" to participate in elite sport.

Finally, when the intent of a research endeavour is advocacy for a marginalized group, it is easy to fall into the either/or dichotomy seen today in the resurrected debate surrounding Title IX. The loudest detractors of such legislation point to the detrimental effect that the promotion of women's sport has had on men's sport. While completing this study, I was often challenged by professionals who felt that identifying a sub-group within a special population would further marginalize the athlete with a disability. After spending time with these athletes, I argue that the categories we have developed regarding "normal" or "special" sport and the socially constructed meaning attached to "disability" and "able-bodied" have failed us in our attempts to improve the disability sport forum. At the very least, these assumed differences have defined our research focus to the extent that we have reinforced a system of biological determinism, limiting both our inquiry and the athletes' opportunities for expression. The inclusion of the lived experience and contribution of the female athlete in our research allows us to build a better understanding of the elite sport world and how it impacts all athletes. However, we cannot stop there. When initiating, supporting, or facilitating research of this nature, we must go one step further and develop the link between research and practice. Taking a position on an issue, or developing a Task Force to examine the issue is important only if we develop a plan of action and then use that plan to examine and test the system.

Based on my experiences as a student, educator, researcher, and professional in this field, I contend that although we appear to be immersed in conflict and controversy, we are only experiencing what are commonly referred to as "growing pains." I believe that if we embrace the issues and contradictions associated with growth, work to understand better the social world in which we operate and its implications for disability sport, and instill our efforts (research and other) with a recognition of our complicity in socially constructing elite disability sport, we will avoid many of the pitfalls discussed here. In order to build a "more equitable playing field," we can remember the work and ideals of our forebears, recognizing that we did not make or invent disability sport, for the athletes have provided us with our professional roles. This issue is not one that should paradoxically divide our research efforts, nor is it an issue applicable to only one level of the sport structure. The honesty with which we embrace our accomplishments and failures, and the importance which we attach to issues related to equity and "fair play" is always a measure of what has gone before and of what will follow.

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CHAPTER 5

Women and Disability Sport: Perceptions and Approaches of Women Working in the Paralympic Movement

Introduction

To acknowledge the agency/structure dichotomy between the creator/researcher and the object/subject acting in that creation, the perceptions of women involved in constructing, developing and administering the disability sport movement were examined. This strategy was used to gain insight into the power structure which governs disability sport by examining the issues through the eyes of women actively involved in that structure. The interplay of agency and structure is an often-debated topic in discussion on social theory (Giddens, 1986). By examining the issue of representation through the perceptions of athletes and administrators, I aim to identify and describe the ways in which women in this field produce and verify knowledge. More importantly, I intend to examine the disparities between administrators' and athletes' perceptions and the various viewpoints among women in this field. This approach is supported by Scraton, Fasting, Pfister, and Bunuel (1992), who have examined the way able-bodied women validated and constructed their sport experience in Europe. In addition to documenting the experiences of the informants, those researchers studied their own experiences within the field as administrators and creators of sport.

After considering the athlete's perceptions of disability sport, I sought a better understanding of the sport organization or the "system" which shaped many of the athletes' experiences. This fourth and final study, "Women and Disability Sport: Perceptions and Approaches of Women Working in the Paralympic Movement" is an examination of elite disability sport, through the eyes of women administrators who develop policy, provide opportunity, and dispense resources.

In the previous study I was an outsider in that I did not have a disability, nor had I participated as an athlete in elite sport. In this study I share similar experiences with the participants. I have insider status because of my professional associations and personal links with the International Paralympic Committee. My insider status afforded certain advantages such as ease of entrée, similar definitions of the situation, knowledge of the argot, and a sensitivity to minimize the reactive effects of interviewing (Seidman, 1991).

Basic to feminist discourse is the idea that "the personal is political." Stanley and Wise (1983) suggest that this insistence of the importance of the personal must also include an insistence on the importance and presence of the personal within research experiences as much as within any other experiences. Moreover, the personal does not only impact the political, it is the crucial variable which is pervasive in each and every attempt to "do research," although it is frequently invisible in terms of the presentation of research. As I am personally committed to the tenets espoused by the Paralympic Movement, this concept lends itself to the examination of some of my political decision-making in respect to studying disability sport. For me, the personal is difficult to disentangle from the political; I assume the same is true for other feminist researchers and administrators in disability sport.

Sherrill (1997) has stated the need for more women at the administrative level of elite disability sport, while DePauw (1994) has suggested the need for more feminist theory to support the choices we make when creating the disability sport field. The assumption is that this would provide a more equitable playing field for female athletes. This study provided a vehicle through which I could examine this assumption, using post-structural theory and elements of social constructivist thought. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of women working in elite disability sport. Similar to the previous study, the present study examines the initiation into, sustainment of, and deterrents to these women's participation in the administrative process.

Ontological Perspective

The theoretical nature of social constructivism is congruent with how I perceive the reality in which the informants and I operate. In this context, I believe that reality is multiple, apprehendable, sometimes conflicting, and is the product of human construction.

Epistemological Perspective

Again, the informant and the researcher are interactively linked. The findings and resulting discussion are literally created during the research process. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the traditional distinction between ontology and epistemology is blurred. The research process is not value-free and there is an acknowledged and explored subjectivity.

When combined with the information gleaned from the previous study, a top-down and bottom-up approach for examining the issues related to the under-representation of females in disability sport is provided. This combination of approaches was supported recently in discussions surrounding the participation of women in disability sport (Sherrill, DePauw, Doll-Tepper, Cable, Hansen, & Dendy, 1994).

Interestingly, when examining the two different contextual realities of the athlete and the administrator, I am once again struck by the scope of perceptions related to equity. Noting that my general goal in the entire project is to bring attention to the issues of the female athlete with a disability and to advocate for more equitable sport practices, it is important to examine the lack of consensus which exists among scholars in this area. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), "the goal of constructivist inquiry is to achieve a consensus (or, failing that, an agenda for negotiation) on issues and concerns that define the nature of inquiry." They state that the comparing and contrasting of divergent viewpoints or constructions is necessary and should be used in an effort to achieve synthesis. In line with constructivist thinking, I am in agreement that knowledge and truth are created and relative to one's perceived reality; consequently, synthesis or consensus may be difficult to achieve.

A recent article on post-structural inquiry and its applications in disability sport delves deeper into the impact of ontological relativism in disability sport (Williams & Olenik, in press). Included in their discussion is an outline taken from the text Varieties of Relativism (Harre & Krausz, 1996), which examines four components of ontological relativism. Those components are that there is no common world for all people, there is no universal system of real causal processes, there are no common social phenomena for all people, and there are no common human values. Schwandt (1994) also comments on everyday constructivistic thinking and how it impacts the research process: "we invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience and, further, we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience." At the end of my data collection, I admit that my construction of "women and disability sport" was modified, and often recreated, with each new theoretical framing in the four studies. This transformation of my viewpoint is due to my own experiences in the research impacting my interpretation of the world I have studied. My frame of interpretation (versions) belong both to what is interpreted (worlds) and to a system of interpretation. Social constructivism is the paradigm used in this study; consequently, I expect my constructions to be challenged as new information conflicts with my interpretations.

Informants

Participants in this study were professional women involved in the promotion, creation and development of disability sport at the elite level. They have indicated that the issues of the female athlete need to be examined to ensure that there is equitable opportunity for women in disability sport. Therefore, informants were chosen through purposeful sampling and self-selection (Patton, 1990). Over thirty-five women agreed to take part in the study, representing Western Europe, Canada and the United States. Twenty of those women were selected, based on regional representation, logistics and professional capacity. It was not my intent to examine a sample of women in order to generalize to all female professionals in the Paralympic Movement. Rather, I tried to interview women in a broad variety of occupations, including sport organization executives, sport sponsorship executives, educators, and national and international leaders in the field of disability sport. Descriptive statistics on these women can be found in Table 5-1.

Table 5-1

Descriptive Statistics of Informants: Women Administrators in Elite Disability Sport

Demographic	Statistic
Sex	20 Women
Age Range	34-65
Level of Involvement in Sport Administration	12 Chairpersons or Presidents of sport administrative organizations or corporations 5 Executive positions within sport administrative organizations 3 Elite academics-researchers (also hold positions on executive committees of sport administrative organizations) 1 Sport Ambassador
Life Status	11 Lifetime Partner or Married 5 Divorced 4 Never Married 8 with Children
Disability Status	15 Able-bodied 5 with Disabilities
Education	20 with University Degrees (12 graduate degrees)
Country of Origin	10 USA 8 Canada 2 Western Europe
Sport Status	11 Previously involved as competitive athletes (either able-bodied and/or disability sport)

Informants were provided with an information sheet outlining the purpose of the project (Appendix I) and informed consent was obtained. Of primary concern was the issue of maintaining the anonymity of the informant. The standard assumption is that participants in in-depth interview studies will remain anonymous (Seidman, 1991). Because of the positions these women held within the field of disability sport it was necessary to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity so that the participants would not be vulnerable to possible repercussions in the workplace. To protect the participants and establish conditions in which they would feel safe to "talk," explicit guidelines for the handling of data were developed and are included in the consent form (Appendix J).

Method

Qualitative data were collected using in-depth individual interviews. Descriptive data relative to the characteristics (i.e., age, degree of involvement in disability sport, level of achievement, socio-economic status, race, country of origin) of the group was also collected. Interviews were semi-structured and based on a question framework developed from the two earlier studies (Appendix K). Specifically, the participants were asked to share the defining moments associated with their initial involvement in disability sport, the coping mechanisms used to sustain their involvement and the possible deterrents to their continued involvement. Participants were also asked to describe themselves, their management ideas relative to administration and the factors they attributed to their individual success. Finally, they were asked to comment on the issues raised by the athletes in the previous studies and to provide their perceptions of the Paralympic Movement and gender equity. The self-noted demographic characteristics of this group were also identified, including personal attributes which intersect their professional personae.

Results

The following section highlights the comments made in the interviews. In keeping with the previous study, the issues discussed pertain to initiation into the field, sustaining professional involvement in the sport social world, deterrents to career development, success, and equity issues related to Paralympic sport. The informants responded more readily to questions about their work and career choices, rather than those about their personal lives. However, a few of these women saw their personal lives and careers as inseparable or at least not mutually exclusive. Table 5-2 illustrates the most frequently mentioned issues concerning initiation, sustainment, and deterrence.

Table 5-2

Initiation, Sustainment and Deterrent to Sport Administration Career

Initiation	**Sustainment**	**Deterrent**
Sport Experience - love of sport	Altruism/Social Responsibility (seeing benefit to athletes)	Consumption of time
Unintentional (by "accident")	Self-satisfaction (world view)	Little Financial Support
Career choice (Educational path)	Thrill and excitement of being able to make a difference	Frustration with system
Rehabilitation base (Medical model)	Support network - friends - family	Lack of power (ability to make a difference)
	Deep commitment to the job	

Note: Three of the twenty informants left their positions subsequent to my interview, for reasons unknown.

Factors Related to Initial Involvement

Entrance into the field of disability sport was through many different gates. The most striking similarity among these women was that all of them had a previous or present involvement in sport as participants. All of the women spoke of sport as a vehicle for their own personal development and enhanced life quality. This translated into a career choice which combined both their love of sport and other interests (e.g., teaching, medicine, public relations). The most often mentioned stimuli to initiation were a basic "love" of sport and sport as a vehicle which reinforces their personal views on life and society.

> Sport has always been an important part of my life, recreation, family and friends. After, my accident I picked up disability sport with a vengeance and drive, to just get back into life. And, I see it as a way for all people with disabilities to get back into life. The "just do it" attitude.
>
> I am probably a teacher first. It isn't just sport, it was just a pure interest in disability, because I always felt that the way to learn about disability, if possible, is through sport and recreation. It is the vehicle, metaphoric for life.

A specific career choice based on a purposeful educational path and an easy transfer from the medical field to the field of disability sport was also mentioned and often paired with statements about the immediate reward received as soon as they became involved.

> I got involved with disability sport, in particular after becoming a physical therapist. I had been a PT for about a year and was in a big teaching hospital and there was a workshop that was being held to orient medical people to the new classification system. So, we went and from our department, pretty much en mass, to this workshop because it was encouraged by the Director of the rehabilitation centre. I didn't really have any big intentions of doing anything more, except I was interested, so a few months later I went to some Games and then we started working with the athletes. About two months later a competition was held, and one of our athletes did so well that in his first throw of his first event he broke a national record. I was hooked at that point. I just said, this is great, I love this.
>
> I come from a physical education background, and during University, the Director of the institute was looking into providing physical education programs to children with cerebral palsy. And I volunteered, not knowing what would happen, what would come out of it. I had no real idea, except that I was curious. For me, physical activity was always something that I could do very easily. When someone taught me a new sport, I would just immediately, well, someone would have to explain it to me and then give me a little time to practice and then I could do it. I always had a very easy time of it, and I was curious how it is for a child or a person to not have the natural coordination abilities.

Sustaining a Career in Disability Sport

Many different practices were used by these women to sustain their involvement in careers they described as very intense, demanding, and exciting. The ability to sustain their level of involvement as evidenced by responses related to "why they do what they do" fell under two thematic areas. The first was relative to the internal or intrinsic satisfaction derived from their involvement including: a basic altruistic or social belief related to disability sport, the self-satisfaction achieved when realizing the world-view or impact of their efforts, and the thrill and excitement associated with creating whether it be in teaching or sport administration.

> I believe in it. I believe very strongly that athletes with a disability should have the opportunity to compete at the Olympic Games. I have felt that from the beginning.
>
> The excitement of the students. Primarily, each new generation. Every time I direct a thesis or a dissertation I think it is the best one in the world, and it is going to be published. I'm absolutely fascinated by the human mind and I like minds that work well. On the other hand, I can get fascinated by a Class 1 CP who is bright and doesn't have the communication skills to express themselves. So individual difference, I've often said, I can go to either extreme. I don't do necessarily do well with just the ordinary average person who doesn't seem to be motivated to do anything.
>
> I guess it is the challenge of getting things done. This is a job where you can see end results, you can see things happening and that is what keeps you going. I've got very much social values, like I really think that I need to contribute, and If I'm feeling that way, then that's great. If I weren't here tomorrow, I'd probably be working in social services, that's where I'd be, where I can effect a change and I'd probably be more at the local or provincial level where it is closer to where the change is happening, then at the national level.

A second area of support or sustainment frequently reported was a support network of friends and especially family who "allowed" these women the space in their lives to maintain a high commitment to their career path.

> I have a wonderful husband who is his own person, and lets me be my own person, and supports me more than anyone can imagine in terms of what I do.
>
> I have to go back and say that I think the foundation of family. The value systems, and the responsibility and the commitment that my parents gave me.

Interestingly, only three of the twenty women spoke of outside interests which helped them cope with the level of intensity required for their jobs. Possibly the interview did not provide enough encouragement for them to talk about experiences outside of the context of sport, or if these women were so involved with their careers that there was little time for other outside interests:

> Interaction with other people helps. I do some meditation and I try to exercise a lot, and do things that are kind of routine. I also have other interests. I take classes myself. I'm taking Arabic now, actually, and I have learned Spanish. I taught a whole seminar in Brazil on my own in Spanish, before the translator got there. I think continual attempts at self-improvement and new experiences add to my overall ability to maintain my involvement in disability sport.

Deterrents to Continuing Involvement

Questions about deterrents to their career choices, or why these women might consider leaving, were often difficult to answer. It took two or three queries before any of the informants articulated their feelings about "quitting," or leaving the field. All of the deterrents mentioned were related to four basic areas: a position which became too time-consuming, the lack of remuneration, loss of power, and frustration with the system. These issues seemed somewhat vexing to these women and many would preface their statements with comments about the need to be flexible, to compromise and maintain their commitment. The following quotations are indicative of the major deterrents to their continued involvement:

> If I wasn't being supported, and there have been times where I haven't felt that supported, or if I had my hands tied somehow. I just need to do what needs to be done, and sometimes that means stepping on toes, so if the environment ever got so bad, that I couldn't follow my vision, or principles, I would quit.
>
> If I saw this movement head in a direction that I just couldn't agree with personally. Like if I didn't see enough commitment and support for something as fundamental as equity, and I saw decisions being made and actions being taken that were continually inequitable, if I didn't think I had the ability to impact the decision making process, I would probably move back to the grass roots level, where you can at least see the daily difference you're making.
>
> I would probably leave if things got too time consuming again. One of those jobs where you end up doing everything, you're the public relations person, the fundraiser, the coach, the organizer, everything. I think that is quite typical of the type of involvement that people in this field get into and then get totally in over their heads.
>
> Sometimes it is difficult to get anything done. It is so much work, for so few people. Part of the problem is that, first of all nobody is getting really paid. So, the egos that are involved with this too are incredible, and the feelings that get hurt. Because without the impetus of money, people are personally involved. And, all of that stuff is usually at the base of somebody's motivation to be involved. If I had to continually tread on thin ice, because of the lack of professionalism...

Defining Success

Another aspect that was intriguing to me on a personal level, was how these women described the "keys" to their success and how they operationalized those characteristics or skills which aided them in developing a successful work environment. Interestingly, very few of the comments were directed at managing the process of how work gets done, but instead focussed on the content and substance of their performance relative to personal traits. Nearly all of these women associated success with ideology in the form of personal characteristics, and very few with pragmatic management skills that I could identify across the cases:

> You have to be a good gatherer of people, at finding consensus, and then making it happen. You have to be able to look down the road and say, what is going to happen? what is around the corner? but then you have to be able to come back and be able to take the baby steps of what it takes to get there. A lot of times, it is easy to look around the corner, but it is very hard if you are a visionary, to come back and grab the group.
>
> In order to succeed you need to find a niche, quality... do better than anyone else, and surround yourself with great people. And, make sure it is fun. It has to be fun.
>
> I think you have to have a sense of hope. And, then you have to have the background material, so that you can mesh, any personal experiences and wisdom, with where the organization is... by looking at the vision of the organization.

However, two of the 20 participants did discuss the "road to success," or achievement, as a planned behavior, one that required cooperation and a high level of organization.

> I believe that it has to be a multi-dimensional planned behavior. I think if you want to be a leader you start planning early in your life and you plan very carefully. Number one, you find a series of mentors which meet your needs at various times of life, you don't stick with one mentor because if life is the way it should be, you outgrow a mentor and go onto another. I think you develop the style for your leadership. Your leadership, your contribution comes first, and you realize you can not be a well-balanced person, that is some sort of dream from Greek philosophy. I still tell people that they ought to be well-balanced, but when it comes right down to it, the discrepancy between the way leaders lead their lives and other people lead their lives is so great that we might as well be honest and say, we can't be very balanced, you have to be almost fanatic about your commitment.
>
> First of all, I am very well organized in the preparation of something. There is not much that could happen to destroy or disturb me in a meeting. I also have the support of people who are well-informed, and if I forget something, they will do it for me. Every day at the end of the day, I kind of make a list of what my expectations were and what reality was, and compare these two things. If I think overall it went well, then this makes me feel much more comfortable, and then I can look to the next day with an optimistic view. Sometimes I am a bit torn, I would like to spend more time interacting with people, but it is a very pleasant feeling to know that without many words the others understand and appreciate my work, and put in their own efforts. I think that is what is the most exciting, is that if

> people can cooperate and can come up with new ideas and have a vision without fighting each other, I think that is really success. I think I have the organizational skills to bring people together, in a positive and productive way.

Self Identity and Self Definition

It is noteworthy that most of these women have taken the time to reflect on their careers. Many of the women spoke of finding themselves in their work, and understanding those characteristics or personal attributes that allowed them to achieve a high level of performance. "Commitment" was the adjective used most often when asked to describe themselves. Often that commitment was described as "unbreakable," along with the perception that the field of disability sport had been entrusted to them.

> I am caring, I think. Powerfully motivated by caring about issues. Persistent. Competitive. Self-actualizing. Competent. Hard, hard, hardworking, Challenged. And extremely committed. My deep down need to let people know sometimes that the sky is falling, run around and scream the sky is falling, but deep down inside I've always known that we learn from it and will overcome. At my funeral, the song that I have requested everybody to sing is "We Shall Overcome," because I love that song. And in many ways I feel like it is an expression of my mind.

> Value based, strong values in terms of community, social and all of that. Committed, pretty committed to anything that I do, to the point of over committing sometimes and then not being good at anything. Dedicated, probably, like I see things through to the end. Loyal. Caring as well, very giving, my needs come last most of the time.

An innate competitiveness was also very apparent in the self-perceptions of these women. Often, socially-oriented descriptors were given; however, when all was said and done, I had the impression that these women were extremely competitive. Given the highly challenging and often egocentric nature of elite sport, the competitive theme is not surprising. In two follow-up telephone interviews occurring shortly before the Atlanta Paralympic Games, a competitive theme was apparent. One informant brought to mind the often-quoted statement by an athlete from the Seoul Olympics: "second place is really just the first loser."

> I am someone who is willing to look at things from a different vantage point, willing to take risks, and willing to be controversial in a very competitive way. I believe I do it with an air of dignity, because if you are bucking the system, then you better be very specific and strategic about how you do that. If you truly want to make change happen. So, I think I am a change agent. Someone who has the drive and the propensity, and the belief that this work counts. It is important.

> I think I am a committed person. I'm a good communicator, I think I'm pretty confident in myself. I am no longer an athlete, but I still have that jock mentality. I still want to win and I'm very competitive. I don't make any apologies for that. I like to work in groups. I'm pretty sensitive, and sometimes react too easily. I wear my feelings on my sleeve, and I think that is okay too.

The Female Administrator in the Disability Sport System

Immediately after starting the data analysis, I marked all statements that were related to the context of working in the sport system. Then statements that appeared to be specific to what it is like to be a woman in the male-dominated professional world of elite disability sport were noted. The majority (15 of the 20 women) stated that being a female definitely differentiated their roles from that of their male counterparts. Very few of the women spoke of inherent gender equity biases or discrepancies in their respective organizations. On the other hand, they did see their "way of working" as different from their male counterparts. Their statements are of interest in light of conclusions drawn by feminist scholars examining the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The need for more women to be a part of the sport governing bodies in Olympic sport has been identified as a prerequisite for more involvement of the female athlete at the Olympic Games (Borish, 1996, Hargreaves 1984; Spears, 1988). However, there has been no research on the perceptions of women actively involved in the power structures (for comparison). Instead, conclusions were based on participation numbers and *a priori* social-cultural theory which states that the inequities between women and men will continue to exist unless women have more access to decision-making and the prerogative to influence the elite sport model (Borish, 1996). The history of the IOC is an obvious example of how men have controlled the domain of Olympic sport (Boutlier & SanGiovanni, 1983). Given the near invisibility of women at the 1996 International Paralympic Committee Extra-Ordinary General Assembly, it seems the Paralympic Movement is adopting a similar hegemonic arrangement. The following statements represent the various roles that these women felt they played or had experienced:

> I was really out there with all the men, and competing with men all the time, because there were no women. So this issue has been going on in my personal experience for sixteen years, and it was very hard back then because there were certainly few programs. So you had to be pretty forthright and determined, and have the financial resources to be able to do something like this.
>
> The majority of students in my classroom are women. I see my role or responsibility is to give them the opportunity to experience as much as possible in this area. So, I have them join in meetings, or come to conferences, go to the sport events, like world championships. But, also to take on different tasks or different roles so that they can, and I think it is very important, experience a little bit of everything and then choose something they can do well. Most people working in this area work long hours at many different things, I think in this system it is better to concentrate more, to get as much out of it as possible.

Concerning the possible inequities or lack of opportunities available for women in elite organized sport, the dialogue inevitably turned to the "essential differences" between men and women in this field. Are these differences a consequence of the social construction of appropriate behaviour for female leaders or are they biologically predetermined? This topic has been explored with the female athlete in able bodied sport, but not with female administrators (Allison, 1991). Has the "role conflict" of the female in sport been invented by the male sport system, by researchers, by educators and then systemically reinforced to uphold the current power structure? Or as two of the informants stated, is this a phenomenon based on an inherent difference in the working styles of men and women?

> I think women do it often with a fresh approach, bringing the athletes into it, changing the imaging, making it fun, giving it color, bringing it attitude, bringing people, bringing mystique.
>
> I think women in adapted, as well as disability sport are more nurturing and caring and understanding, empathic. I think from the standpoint of sport, they want to win just as badly, they're just as competitive, they're just as athletic, but they are able to tolerate more individual differences, maybe tolerate is not the best word, you know, they are accepting. I think also they're more challenged by unused potential. Ten years ago they would say that they wanted to make the athlete the best they can be, but today, they'd say that I want to empower that person to make herself or himself the best he or she can be.

Perceptions of Equity

Finally, I explored the perceptions that these women held regarding the lack of participation by the female athlete and equity issues. All of the women considered the under-representation of the female athlete to be an important equity issue which should be acknowledged. Many talked of empowering the female athlete, mentoring, and enabling more young women to become involved in the administration and development of sport:

> We have an extremely strong responsibility to be political and to teach advocacy. Basically I mean that in broad terms that encompass political skills that you need to be an enabler or empowerer. And, I truly think that we need to be more active in legislative lobbying, those kinds of behaviours need to be taught and practiced.

However, when asked about a specific link to practice within their respective sport organization, only two of the 20 women had been involved in or initiated a formal mandate or strategic plan to address equity. Three of the women felt that issuing a formal statement regarding the female athlete and her participation would label them "special interest" advocates and that such a statement was inappropriate for someone who was responsible for all of her clients, constituents, or athletes:

> My actions in the profession are just a reflection of my belief in equity period, for all. I don't place a higher value on an athlete who wants to compete in the Olympics vs. the Paralympics. The only thing that is important to me is that they not be denied the opportunity to compete in the element of their choice. It is the same for the female athletes, I mean, give them the opportunity and let them choose which activity that they want to pursue or participate in. I don't see them as different from the male athletes. It doesn't matter what social arena you take it, whether it is sport, business, education, it is the same principle.

Ironically, disability sport is often portrayed as a "special interest" movement to the able-bodied public. Whether these women believed the "double jeopardy" of being female and disabled and were therefore concerned about losing the meaning attached to the word athlete is a topic for further exploration.

Similar to the athletes' perceptions, these administrators also spoke of an ambiguity attached to the role of woman and professional (whether it be athlete or administrator). While the athletes related experiences of being the team nurturer, fundraiser, advocate and athlete, the administrators spoke of a socialization process that was difficult to navigate:

> I think men and women are socially different from the time we're born. And that was true 40 years ago, and I think it is still true today, although hidden perhaps in different ways. Today, the woman's experience has more ambiguity. I think the socialization process may be harder to deal with... back then I mean we could clearly rebel because we were told that the woman's place was in the home, but now one day you hear that the woman's place is still in the home, but also hey, you're a wonderful Ph.D. candidate. And, ambiguity is the hardest thing in the whole world to deal with.

Also of interest was the lack of opportunities these women found to validate their perceptions or experiences relative to inequitable practices or situations. As with the athletes, there seemed to be very little shared information about the female administrator, her participation numbers, or characteristics:

> I have some probable perceptions about gender equity, but I haven't gone that extra step to try and validate whether they are real or not. I mean from some of the data analysis that we have done in our office, I know there is a clear discrepancy of difference in the level of participation between men and women, which is why so few women's events met the minimum criteria for the IPC. But, I have only made some changes within my own organization to sort of even out the playing field. However, I have not taken it any further, I don't have a global perspective, nor do I know what is happening in the other sport organizations.

The most similar response to questions asked of both athletes and administrators regarded the development of more sport opportunities for women. Five of the women responded that "contact theory," or more promotion, of the authentic female athlete alongside the male wheelchair athlete would be a positive first step:

> As President, I am not as familiar with the technical side of the sport, I think the key, however, to bringing more women aboard, is to get more women involved at the grassroots level. I don't think any of our disability groups do a good job at promoting sport as an opportunity for people with disabilities. I think they are kind of focussed on administering the events. They do not do anything proactive at all. So I think promotion and marketing is a good first step. We need to get some ads on TV that are going to help. Focussing on real female athletes. We are so reactive when it comes to the media. We answer calls and send out a media kit, but we don't profile our athletes as much as we could.

Discussion

In the final analysis, I found little similarity in experience between the social world of the athlete and that of the elite female administrator. This dissimilarity may be due to the female administrator's insensitivity to the issues of the female athlete. This outcome was not surprising, as I have noticed a gap between the perceptions of the athlete and the actors in the sport governing body on many occasions in my own professional experiences. From my experience I also know that there are very few opportunities for women in this field to gather and verify knowledge or confirm intuitive perceptions with their female colleagues. Overall, in elite disability sport, there are a very small number of people faced with the overwhelming challenge of sustaining a sport system that is growing faster than any other non-profit sport organization in the world (Steadward & Peterson, 1998). Of that number, very few are women. At the 1996 International Paralympic Committee Extra-Ordinary General Assembly in Atlanta, Georgia, less than 10% of the participants were women. This assembly was comprised of all of the member nations of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and the executives of the International Sport Organizations of the Disabled (IOSDs). Of those 10% participating, roughly half were administrative assistants, interpreters or personal assistants who were not directly involved in the voting process. At this meeting, the IPC formally passed the mandate to reconfirm its commitment to gender equity and the inclusion of more individuals with severe disabilities into the Paralympic Games. No one took the floor to ask "what" that commitment entailed, or why the two contextually different groups were included together in the mandate. As the IPC has already stated its commitment to gender equity in its constitution, I can only assume that this mandate was a gesture of reaffirmation or political correctness and not one that was expected to be linked directly to action.

According to Lather (1991), emancipatory knowledge increases awareness of the contradictions distorted or hidden by everyday understandings, and in doing so, it directs attention to the possibilities for social transformation inherent in the present configuration of social processes. However, researchers or sport governing bodies often impose meanings on situations rather than constructing meaning through negotiation with the research participant or subjects of discussion. This is often done in the name of "emancipation" or "empowerment." In order to link policy decisions to actual practice in a fashion which is deemed emancipatory, I believe that we have a responsibility to examine the gender equity issue more closely and more rigorously. We need to discover the necessary conditions to initiate and sustain more female athletes in elite sport. However, this sort of link needed between process and research would require a great amount of commitment to, as well as forethought and self-reflection about, the way in which we construe or construct elite disability sport and the female athlete. This call for attention to the way we, as researchers, attach meaning to disability sport has been made by other feminist researchers in the field (DePauw, 1994; Sherrill, 1997). Sherrill (1997) has commented on the implications of male hegemony in disability sport and the need for further examination of gender issues. My conclusion from these interviews with women who are in principle highly committed to gender equity is that they are either unable, unempowered or, quite frankly, too exhausted to examine this issue in all its complexity.

As cited in the theoretical discussion at the beginning of this paper, Lincoln and Guba (1989) stated that an agenda for negotiation on the issues and concerns that define the nature of inquiry is required and may be necessary before finding a consensus or synthesis of experience when using the social constructivist model. The scope and breadth of experiences shared by these women was immense. On a personal and professional level I found their insight and speculations about the world of disability sport often conflicting and paradoxical. Maintaining a position of power as these women have, requires the ability to work against the norms of the traditional sport culture, while simultaneously being sensitive to it. A woman of vision often was also a woman who compromised that vision, because of a larger commitment to the preservation of the sport system as it now exists. In a similar qualitative study, Mainiero (1994) concluded that powerful women executives in Fortune 500 companies became politically seasoned by often working counter-intuitively. According to her informants, they had learned to work against the norms of the culture while simultaneously being sensitive to them. This was accomplished when one was refining her style of management or administration, after moving from a stage of political naivete, and while building her career. An awareness of corporate culture (e.g., Paralympic Movement) would seem a prerequisite to skill development as a manager/administrator. Further inquiry is needed regarding the "awareness levels" of the female administrator in elite disability sport. What influenced her career development? Where did she receive her mentoring? How does she process political, social, and cultural information, and does she integrate these concepts into her administrative role?

Including the experience of women administrators in the analysis of the Paralympic Movement was one of the most viable research techniques available. In order to change research production in this area we must first understand the language, concepts, and motivations of the actors involved in the elite sport institution. Strict analysis of participation numbers will not reflect levels of commitment, modes of operation, nor meaning that the administrators attach to the work they accomplish. Without their words we assume their experiences to be congruent with the male sport experience, and thus find ourselves in a paradox. Why would women accept under-representation, inequitable practices, and a lack of recognition in order to reinforce an institution based on the traditional male sport ideals? This same paradox has been mentioned by Parks, Russell, Wood, Roberto, and Shewokis (1995), who studied women working in intercollegiate athletic administration. In their study female athletic administrators reported very high job satisfaction, despite inequitable pay and inequitable promotion practices. Unfortunately, the study did not explain why these women said they were satisfied. In other words, how did they measure their satisfaction? Speculation centered on the possible pioneer status these women held or the power associated with being one of the few women working in a male-dominated field. It is important to note that these researchers had not gathered tangible evidence or text to support their speculation and recommendations were based on an attempt to interpret or attach contextual meaning to survey based statistics.

Despite working in a field that by definition dampens difference in favor of inclusivity, many female administrators continue to subconsciously reproduce socially constructed barriers to that inclusivity in regard to gender equity. A cogent illustration of this phenomenon is contained in the following remarks made by an elite female administrator in disability sport about another woman in a similar position:

> Anne Merklinger receives great respect from her colleagues. Pay Heydon says, "Anne developed a good relationship with the Koreans. She went over on a couple of trips before the games and established a tremendous relationship with the organizing committee to the point that I think they truly respected her as an individual and saw

past the barrier of her being a woman." (Steadward & Peterson, 1998, p. 217)

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CHAPTER 6

Conclusions and Implications

Interpreting Women, Disability and Sport

In reviewing the literature, I was pleased to find valuable and comprehensive work related to women and disability and women and sport. Unfortunately, the intersection of women and disability within the context of sport has not received the attention given to other marginalized groups in sport (e.g., lesbians, the black athlete, children).

Shogan (1997) speculates on the social construction of difference and its place on the margins relative to a "normed population" when she asks:

> When there is a goal of normalization in Adapted Physical Activity programs, does normalization require "norming the nonstandard;" that is, does it require making the disabled more like able-bodied? Further, if the aged, the young, disabled, chronically ill, poor, women are special nonstandard populations, what are characteristics of 'the normal' population. (p.15)

The lack of attention to the female athlete with a disability may be due in part to the complexity of issues surrounding disability and gender. We know that representations of gender and the way that gender operates in the world of sport are not static. According to Adams (1995), gender is an ideological construct that is an integral part of all aspects of social, economic and political life. The meanings of femininity and masculinity are constantly being challenged and negotiated within a larger nexus of social relations (p. 164). Negotiation of the sporting world is often guided by socially reinforced gender roles, or culturally accepted gendered sports. Football, baseball, hockey, and rugby are the most apparent examples of male-gendered sports, while rhythmic gymnastics, figure skating, field hockey, and synchronized swimming are perceived as being more appropriate for women. Interestingly, men who participate in gymnastics or figure skating are often assumed to be homosexual or at least in some sort of conflict with heterosexuality or maleness.

Sexual orientation aside, we also know that the socially perceived characteristics associated with disability are weakness, disadvantage, and illness. Combining the social category of gender and the social category of disability, and narrowing it to the context of elite sport produces a tapestry woven with many threads and colors. Examining one variable in isolation, or pulling one thread out of the tapestry, changes the picture in its entirety and leaves a hole which is then difficult to recognize when trying to weave the thread back into place.

I am often asked: "Why aren't women participating in elite disability sport? Is it related to being female, or due to disability?" If I could attribute the lack of participation to one variable like gender or disability or even examine the variables in isolation, I would be fulfilling the desire of some researchers and sport administrators who believe that this is a discrete, person-centered or biologically-based issue. I choose not to answer this question directly, but refocus the question to examine the context of elite disability sport and the ideological assumptions embedded in the disability sport movement. Can you empower the elite female athlete to participate? Do we know what she needs to sustain her involvement? I believe this dissertation has provided a basis for answering these questions; however, answers for these questions require further thought on the specific changes we need to make in elite disability sport to meet the needs of the athletes.

For a movement founded on the notion that all people have a right to participate in elite sport and a movement committed to the inclusion of, and celebration of, diversity, it should be possible to extend that consideration to the female athlete. However, exposing hegemony or decentralizing traditional gender-based notions in the sport forum is not without cost. Dewar (1993) examined the historical trend in feminist academe to produce the "generic women," with generic experiences of oppression in sport. Birrell (1990) also argued for better acknowledgement of parallel but very different experiences between and amongst women participating in sport, specifically women of color.

> If we are to understand gender and racial relations in sport, particularly as they relate to women of color, we cannot remain in our old theoretical homes. Instead we need to increase our awareness of issues in the lives of women of color as they themselves articulate these issues. (p. 195)

Although these researchers have yet to apply their epistemological lenses to the female athlete with a disability, as Dewar (1993) states, "we are showing signs that we are learning to find ways of moving away from the relative safety and comfort of our old theoretical homes."

The journey I took in developing the four studies in this dissertation was also a move away from the safety of the scientific paradigm in which I was educated. Despite a contextual similarity, each study produced little actual comparative data. The women informants in each study were not part of an homogeneous group and no generic model was produced. The issues raised in the first study on gender and sport, although useful in providing a starting point and initial question framework, were different from and less directed than the questions used in the following studies on female athletes and administrators. The third and fourth studies, although similar in their theoretical approach and sport context, produced results that conveyed different perceptions and positions within the elite disability sport system. Although some of the perceptions of the female athlete and those of the administrator were similar as in their "love of sport" and their belief in the benefits associated with sport participation, the social worlds in which the two groups operated were incompatible. The administrative group, being more powerful politically and socially, functioned in situations where presumably they could effect change if they chose to do so. This choice did not exist for the female athletes who felt unable to address their issues, especially in those instances where they felt constrained in their sporting role.

In this dissertation, the data and the resulting interpretation are meant to "shed light on the subject." According to Denzin (1994):

> Interpretation is a productive process that sets forth the multiple meanings of an event, object, experience, or text. Interpretation is transformative. It illuminates, throws light on experience. It brings out, and refines, as when butter is

> clarified, the meanings can be sifted from a text, an object, or a slice of experience. So conceived, meaning is not in a text, nor does interpretation precede experience, or its representation. Meaning, interpretation and representation are deeply intertwined in one another. (p. 504)

As mentioned in the introduction it is my intent to let these four theoretically linked studies stand on their own. While each produced a piece of the puzzle, the knowledge created is relative to that upon which each theoretical lens focussed. Each study provided a different theoretical perspective and a different view of a shared experience, that is being both female and an actor in the world of elite disability sport. However, in order to summarize the important issues within and among the four studies a distillation of the findings is presented below:

1. The knowledge generated by the institution of elite disability sport is reproducing socially constructed definitions of the athlete with a disability as different. Disability itself is a barrier to be overcome through sport, rather than being integrated into the athlete and his or her athleticism.
2. Male athletes are most likely to live in the above narrative and state that sport is a means to normalization - to becoming more able-bodied. Male athletes are more likely to reject the biological reality of their disability in favour of accepting society's definition of physicality and movement.
3. Female athletes are more likely to integrate gender and disability into their athleticism and are less likely to use sport as a vehicle to overcome

disability. They integrated their disability into their physicality and movement and were less accepting of society's concepts of the ideal body.

4. Female athletes are not socialized into elite disability sport via the disability sport organizations, physical education, or youth sport, unlike the able-bodied population.
5. Normalization theory or norming the non-standard in disability sport is being applied as a source of legitimation for disability sport.
6. Disability sport by its definition privileges the disability rather than the sport and restricts the female athlete from expressing her athleticism.
7. The International Paralympic Committee has, thus far, adopted the language of gender equity, but demonstrate no specific practices.
8. The false dichotomy that exists in able-bodied sport relevant to gender is being reproduced in disability sport; namely, addressing the female athlete's concerns does not diminish male athlete's status.
9. The female athletes are operating with a different understanding of competitive opportunity than are the sport organizations. Specifically, disability sport believes it is facilitating access to sport, while the female athletes' experience is constrained by a lack of competitive opportunities.
10. The female athlete does not feel she is heard by sport organizers, nor does she feel she has access to the power structures which govern disability sport.
11. Female athletes and female administrators share a "love of sport" for its intrinsic value and not its rehabilitative value.

12. Elite sport participation actively deters the female athlete with a disability from participating by not allowing her the power to shape the forces that shape her.

These findings challenge the assumptions and "common sense" notions that have prevailed in disability sport since its inception. These assumptions are socially constructed, sustained, and reinforced through our use of theory and practice and are not grounded in the athlete. Because they are socially constructed they can change and those who generate knowledge and do the practice are the ones that can change them. Paradigm shifts are difficult to negotiate, but not impossible, as evidenced in my own shift from grounded theory to social constructive thought.

As discussed in the section on the theoretical context of the dissertation, I approached this topic from a variety of epistemological stances: grounded theory, critical theory and social constructivism. The methodological choice of qualitative data collection fit best using the naturalistic paradigm. Throughout this project, I had a commitment to qualitative analysis and interpretation, and an acknowledgement of some of my own personal assumptions and biases within the research. Due to the exploratory nature of this work, I believe that this was the most authentic research process. However, the blurring of lines between the science and art of interpretation often became uncomfortable and the literary account overwhelming. I struggled with a theoretically rebellious desire to examine more closely the methods I had chosen rather than deal with the more pragmatic concern of reporting the results. What ontological views were hidden within the method I was given and then chose to use? Did I ask the "right" questions and what criteria made them right? How would this impact future research in this area? Would the athletes recognize themselves in the final text? Would I recognize myself? I returned to the literature on feminist theory and found an article I had read for a sociology course three years earlier: "Memoirs of an Ontological Exile: The Methodological Rebellions of Feminist Research," by Jill McCalla Vickers (1982). In my first reading of the article I found little to which I could relate; in fact, I deliberately chose to ignore the concepts and ideas put forth as they disturbed my ontological viewpoint relevant to education and research. How could epistemological positions be so carefully crafted and learned without my conscious knowing? Upon rereading this paper, I found my feelings about the present research eloquently and authoritatively expressed:

> The critiques of method (scientific, philosophical, scholarly or theological) engaged in by feminists, moreover, differ from those of other methodological critics because they are largely the product of *hindsight*; that is, they have emerged as *reflections* on research *necessarily* done in a manner which violates many of the methodological canons of the researcher's discipline. (p. 31)

Vickers (1982) goes on to surmise that:

> in this context the researcher (she) learns though an experience of searching and discovery that the "proper" method hides, deliberately or unconsciously, many of the things she must reveal. In order to reveal that which has been systematically hidden, she must recognize that

> method is not neutral even if it is productive and "gets results." (p. 33)

I now realize that this line of inquiry will always be a work in progress, an academic life choice. This dissertation is only an initial discourse; the issues revealed herein and the embedded complexities surrounding gender, disability and sport are just beginning to enter my line of vision. The resulting dialogue between and among researchers, scientists and athletes should lead to further examination and attention directed to this topic and the assumptions embedded in the choice(s) of inquiry, method and reporting should be discussed further.

Re-conceptualizing Feminism

Countless women and a few men have worked diligently to establish a feminist vision related to women and sport. They concur that not only is the elite sport domain socially constructed as "male," but also that the supposedly objective science associated with sport performance and sport opportunity is blind to women's issues. The most powerful influence on my research to this point was, and continues to be, feminism. However, as mentioned before, it is difficult to specifically define a "feminist theory" that absorbs or acknowledges all variables or power relationships working within the life of a woman. Furthermore, like people with disabilities, women are not individuals within an easily identifiable homogenous group. My informants shared experiences of sport and disability; however, their relative perceptions and the meaning they attached to their experiences were different. Acknowledging the diversity among women's perceptions may decentralize our efforts relative to any politicized gender-based action. However, in an effort to appear cohesive we are faced with an even more divisive paradox. When presenting ideas based on this research at national and international conferences, I was disturbed by the prevailing male-female dichotomy that many of my colleagues attach to feminism. In other words, the belief that the empowerment of women or female athletes ultimately leads to the disempowerment of the male athlete. Interestingly, this line of reasoning has extended into the elite sport arena, where statements have been made in the media regarding the threat posed by the athlete with a disability to the able-bodied athlete or extended to the threat of the Paralympic Movement to the Olympic Movement.

According to Mies (1991), if we understand feminist research and science as part of the historical movement out of which it has emerged, then it is impossible to cling to the dichotomy between thought and action, science and politics. We are then left with no alternative but to question contemplative science, which veils power and exploitation by dividing historical reality into separate areas and sets it upon its head. What I am insisting is that the historical reality of disability sport and its future can not continue to be divided into "male" and "female," or "disabled" and "non-disabled," pitting one group against the other. Based on my experiences in this research, I believe that any move toward equity and empowerment of the female athlete in the disability sport system will benefit **all** of the athletes. Providing choice, justice, impartiality and giving each female athlete her due is possible without disenfranchising the male athlete.

Finally, feminism is not something I can disentangle from myself as a whole person. Whether my role is athlete, mother, sister, scientist, teacher or researcher, the meaning I attach to each role is inseparable from my role as a woman in this society. My only instances of "role conflict" occur when I am forced to "fit" my experiences into a system which has been constructed to meet the needs of other scientists and not my own. I was struck by the following statement by an elite female administrator in this study:

> I definitely believe in feminism. I think feminism is really looking at the essence of experience of women. It is not anything like what is called the women's movement or what was called the women's liberation movement. It is not a freeing, it is more of an acknowledgement that the experiences of women are different than the experiences of men. And, that your experience as a woman is so tied up in beliefs, culture, values, media expectations, educational garbage. There are just so many things that design what the woman's experience is, that you can't really take those out of context and say that woman have a VO_2 max that is 30% lower than men. There are reasons for that, and part of that has to do with the Y chromosome, but what if it doesn't? Much of it is environment, a lot of it is opportunity, a lot of it is just the ability of a young girl to participate in activities that would change things. So, I think being a women is very much, it is not only who you are, but it defines in many ways what you do, and you can't separate those by saying that we are going to give all women equal opportunities now. You can do that, but it is not going to have the desired outcome because there are too many other factors that play into it. I definitely believe in feminism, because if you are a woman, you live it.

As the collector of information and the creator of the narrative surrounding this project, I have definitely lived it. I no longer feel it necessary to give up the "complexity"of theory in search of measurable dependent variables and assumed causality. I was struck early on by a quote in Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought (Spellman 1988), attributed to feminist scholar Maria Lugones who stated:

> When I do not see plurality stressed in the very structure of a theory, I know that I will have to do lots of acrobatics - of the contortionist and the walk-on-tightrope kind - to have this theory speak to me without allowing the theory to distort me in my complexity. (p. 80)

In December of 1995, I was a member of a group of researchers and athletes who met in Berlin, Germany to discuss the merits of collaborative research and professional development in the area of women and disability sport. We came from a variety of academic and sporting backgrounds, but more telling were the cultural and political differences among us. Speaking "generally" about the issues was very difficult. Relativism, the matrix of different world versions, appeared as a wall to block our attempts at defining the issues in general terms. We had many truths to discuss and many standards to include. The work of Stanley Fish (1980) provided a way to see what was occurring in this meeting. Fish has informed much of my thinking regarding inquiry into this area and the authority of interpretive communities. He states that while relativism is a position one can entertain, it is not a position one can occupy:

> No one can be a relativist, because no one can achieve the distance from his own belief and assumptions which would result in their being no more authoritative for him than the beliefs and assumptions he himself used to hold. The fear that in a world of indifferently authorized norms and values the individual is without a basis for action is groundless because no one is indifferent to the norms and values that enable his consciousness. It is in the name of personally held (in fact they are doing the holding) norms and values that the individual acts and argues, and he does so with the full confidence that attends belief. When his beliefs change, the norms and values to which he once gave

> unthinking assent will have been demoted to the status of opinions and become the objects of an analytical and critical attention; but that attention will itself be enabled by a new set of norms and values that are, for the time being, as unexamined and undoubted as those they displace. The point is that there is never a moment when one believes nothing, when consciousness is innocent of any and all categories of thought, and whatever categories of thought are operative at a given moment will serve as an undoubted ground. (p. 319)

After losing my intellectual innocence and following many days of discussion, debate and some dissension, we agreed to a Goals and Purpose statement and committed to support and actively pursue those objectives. Entitled "Breaking the Barriers to Participation: Women with Disabilities in Sport - A Cross Cultural and Interdisciplinary Perspective," this document represents one of the first attempts at linking academia to praxis regarding equity and the disability sport movement. The following goal statements were developed at the meeting and reflect the findings in my research:

1. Develop a broader awareness and understanding of the social and cultural world of disability sport.
2. Develop a deeper awareness and understanding of gender and disability in the context of sport.

3. Identify resources and persons currently participating in the field of disability sport (participants, coaches, teachers, administrators, researchers, etc.).
4. Develop a network of persons and organizations involved in the field of women and disability sport.
5. Develop a network of individuals involved in the research of gender and disability sport.
6. Initiate strategies within relevant organizations to implement the guidelines set out within the Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport.
7. Facilitate the clarification and recognition of the identity of the disability sport movement.

I believe that the collaborative approach to any sort of critical action is necessary to truly link research to social change. According to Lather (1991), collaboration is necessary to establish data credibility within praxi-oriented, advocacy research. In order to move forward in the human sciences, she supports research designs which are different, and indeed, contradictory, so that more useful ways of knowing will emerge. Although it may seem otherwise, I am arguing that rather than establish a new orthodoxy, we need to experiment, document and share our efforts toward emancipatory research. By emancipatory, I mean accessible to those we study.

The women at the Berlin meeting arrived with competing world-versions, which resulted in variety of ideas about "what" needed to be done and then "how" it could be accomplished. This sort of ontological relativism resulted in dialogue that was often uncomfortable and seemingly chaotic. This phenomenon, though difficult to apprehend, is discussed in a recent text by Rom Harre and Michael Krausz (1996), entitled Varieties of Relativism. Within this work ontological relativism is discussed using the work of Goodman (1978). He argues that only the accessible counts as real; what is accessible is relative to versions; therefore, what is real is relative to versions. Interestingly, Goodman resists the idea that there is a place for the concept of a world independent of world versions and hence common to all world versions. According to Harre and Krausz (1996), the "rightness" of an interpretation that may distinguish versions cannot be understood as a comparison between versions and a version-independent reality, since that comparison cannot be made.

Fortunately, the possibility for critical discussion about the rightness of certain world-versions is afforded by speaking of the blending of their parts in relation to another as they emerge. Goodman (1978) states that world-versions are formed through the transformations of previous world-versions by composition, decomposition, weighting, deletion, supplementation, deformation and is made accessible to all participants creating a different world-version.

The working group that met in Berlin to discuss women, disability and sport has been successful thus far in linking ideas in this area in North America and Europe. Similarly, in the four studies, relativism was entertained but not necessarily occupied, and my perceptions were transformed. The present work and resulting discussion(s) are not inclusionary and were never assumed to be. However, I believe they are an authentic interpretation of the brief time the participants and I spent in the elite sport context. My intent was not to make generalizations, nor to reveal one truth or standard by which we as researchers can measure all other interaction or conclusions drawn about the woman with a disability participating in elite sport. Instead, it is an offer, or possibly a challenge to the reader to validate or deconstruct the pieces of the puzzle presented. The process will, I hope, transform our way of understanding of "what" we do and "who" it impacts.

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APPENDIX A

History Time Lines in Paralympic Sport

Competition or Event	Year	Organizational Event
First World Games for the Deaf (Silent Games), Paris, France	1924	Formation of CISS
	1925 to 1943	
	1944	Creation of Spinal Injuries Centre at Stoke Mandeville Hospital
	1945	
	1946	
	1947	
First Stoke Mandeville Games	1948	
First World Winter Games for the Deaf, Austria	1949	
	1950	
	1951	
First International Stoke Mandeville Games	1952	Formation of ISMG
	1953	
	1954	
	1955	
	1956	
	1957	
	1958	
	1959	
First Summer Paralympic Games, Rome, Italy	1960	
	1961	
	1962	
	1963	
Summer Paralympic Games, Tokyo, Japan	1964	Formation of ISOD
	1965	
	1966	
	1967	
Summer Paralympic Games, Tel Aviv, Israel	1968	Founding of International Cerebral Palsy Society
	1969	
	1970	
	1971	
Summer Paralympic Games, Heidelberg, Germany	1972	
	1973	
	1974	
	1975	
Summer Paralympic Games (Torontolympiad), Toronto, Canada / First Winter Paralympic Games, Ornskoldsvik, Sweden	1976	
	1977	
	1978	Formation of CP-ISRA
	1979	
Summer Paralympic Games, Arnhem, Holland / Winter Paralympic Games, Geilo, Norway	1980	
	1981	Formation of IBSA

	1982	Formation of ICC
	1983	
Summer Paralympic Games, New York USA & Stoke Mandeville, England / Winter Paralympic Games, Innsbruck, Austria DEMONSTRATION EVENTS - Summer Olympics, Los Angeles, USA / Winter Olympics, Sarajevo, Yugoslavia	1984	
	1985	
DEMONSTRATION EVENT - World Championship in Basketball, Madrid, Spain DEMONSTRATION EVENT - World Championship in Swimming, Madrid, Spain	1986	Formation of INAS-FMH CISS and INAS-FMH joined ICC
DEMONSTRATION EVENT - World Championship in Nordic Skiing, Obersdorf, Germany DEMONSTRATION EVENT - World Championship in Athletic, Rome, Italy	1987	Arnhem Resolutions passed under the ICC
Summer Paralympic Games, Seoul, Korea / Winter Paralympic Games, Innsbruck, Austria DEMONSTRATION EVENT - Wheelchair track events at Seoul Summer Olympic Games DEMONSTRATION EVENT - Blind nordic ski event at Calgary Winter Olympic Games	1988	
DEMONSTRATION EVENT - World Championship in Athletics, Tokyo, Japan	1989	Formation of the IPC
	1990	
	1991	
Summer Paralympic Games, Barcelona, Spain / Winter Paralympic Games, Albertville, France Madrid Paralympic Games (INAS-FMH) DEMONSTRATION EVENT - Summer Olympics, Barcelona, Spain	1992	
DEMONSTRATION EVENT - World Championship in Table Tennis, Gothemburg, Germany DEMONSTRATION EVENT - World Championship in Athletics, Stuttgart, Germany	1993	
Winter Paralympic Games, Lillehammer, Norway	1994	
DEMONSTRATION EVENT - World Championship in Athletics, Gothemburg, Germany	1995	
Summer Paralympic Games, Atlanta, USA	1996	
	1997	
Winter Paralympic Games, Nagano, Japan	1998	
	1999	
Summer Paralympic Games, Sydney, Australia	2000	
	2001	
Winter Paralympic Games, Salt Lake City, USA	2002	

APPENDIX B

Qualitative Analysis Using WordPerfect 5.1

The coding and sorting of interview data is actually quite straightforward. This is a guide to using WordPerfect 5.1 to do what is basically electronic cut and paste.

1 1. Widen the margins on the left hand side of the transcript (approx 3 or 4
2 inches will do).

3 2. Number your lines: Shift F8,1,5.

4 3. Print off a copy of the transcript.

5 4. Go through and code the data. The wide margins provide plenty of
6 room for scribbling. The easiest way to do this is to take each paragraph at
7 a time and create a code that you feel the content describes. Do not worry
8 about creating too many codes. When you name a code, create a six or
9 seven letter word that is not a standard dictionary term, but can be
10 recognised easily. Abbreviations are useful in this instance eg: Single sex
11 organization becomes SSORG; personal politics becomes PPOLIT....

The next stage is to get back on the computer. All you are going to do is some electronic cutting and pasting. The task is to append the coded sections to different files, i.e., all the pieces of text that relate to SSORG are listed in a file that is given that name. The beauty of this system is that you do not have to create a file prior to appending. The command that you use will create the file as you go, so to speak.

What you need to do is devise a system that allows you to know immediately from which interview, and where in the transcript the text has come (the appended document does not show the line numbering). So, go through the transcript on the computer, and place the code, the line number and the participant identification code (I used letters) in the wide margin. It should end up looking something like this:

A5CDING 4. Go through and code the data. The wide margins provide plenty of
room for scribbling. The easiest way to do this is to take each paragraph at
a time and create a code that you feel the content describes. Do not worry
about creating too many codes. When you name a code, create a six or
seven letter word that is not a standard dictionary term, but can be
A11ABBRV recognized easily. Abbreviations are useful in this instance eg: Single sex
organization becomes SSORG; personal politics becomes PPOLIT....

Once you have done this, to append a section of coded data to a file, first block off the particular section (F12) making sure you include the code and identification, then using Ctrl-F4,1,4, the blocked text will be appended to the file you select.

When you are appending to the various files, it is worth doing this on the hard drive because not only is it quicker, but it also means you don't have to worry about which disks you are using, how full they are and so on. You can save onto back up discs once you have completed coding each transcript.

APPENDIX C

Gender Issues in Perception of Disability in Relation to Sport and Physical Activity: A Pilot Study
Consent Form

Investigators: Lisa Olenik, M.Sc.
Contact Phone: (403) 492-7158 Rick Hansen Centre, University of Alberta

I ______________________________ hereby give my consent to be involved in an investigation entitled: "Gender Issues in Perception of Disability in Relation to Sport and Physical Activity: A Pilot Study".

I understand that my involvement will include participation in one focus group, one individual interview with the researcher, and subsequent phone interviews to follow-up or clarify any information produced in the first interview.

I understand that the focus group will consist of informal discussion with five other participants and two group facilitators. Participants will be both male and female. I understand that the focus group session will last between 1 and 2 hours.

I understand that the individual interview will comprise informal discussion relative to my experiences within the social world of disability sport. I understand that the interview will last between 1 and 2 hours.

I understand that the focus group and the individual interviews will be recorded and transcribed to preserve the accuracy of the data and will be viewed only by the principal investigator. I understand that at any point in the recording, I can request that the tape recorder be turned off.

I understand that the identity of the participants will be kept confidential by the investigators and all transcriptions will be coded and kept in a locked filing cabinet. I also understand that all tapes and transcripts will be destroyed at the completion of the project.

I understand that I may withdraw from the interview (investigation) at any time should I so desire and that I may terminate an interview by simple request at any time without prejudice to myself.

I have read the information form regarding this investigation and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Signed ______________________________ Date ____________________
(informant)

Signed ______________________________ Date ____________________
(principal investigator)

APPENDIX D

Gender Issues in Perception of Disability in Relation to Sport and Physical Activity: A Pilot Study

Participant Information Sheet - Consent Form

Investigators: Lisa Olenik, M.Sc.
Contact Phone: (403) 492-7158 Rick Hansen Centre, University of Alberta

The purpose of this investigation is to examine the perceptions of men and women actively involved sport and physical activity. It is hoped that this study will provide insight into the issues surrounding disability, gender and sport, by examining issues through the eyes of men and women actively involved in the a physical activity program.

This study is one of three studies in a project on Women and Disability Sport. Each informant will only participate in one study. For the purposes of the present study, each informant will participate in one focus group lasting approximately 1 to 2 hours, and one individual interview lasting approximately 1 to 2 hours. Each focus group will include 4 other participants, male and female and two group facilitators. Each interview will consist of informal discussion relative to a question framework produced from the focus group.

It is emphasized that these sessions are designed to produce elaborate descriptions of the world in which the informants live and work. Therefore, there is no "right" line of questioning, nor correct answers. The direction that the discussion takes will be determined by the informant.

Descriptive statistics related to age, professional status, ethnicity, and lifestyle will be requested in order to provide a more accurate "picture" of the informants social world.

Once the focus group and interviews are finished, all data, including field notes, and descriptive statistics will be recorded (transcribed) and stored under lock and key. Data will be coded and identify of the informant will be kept confidential. Informants may be asked to participate in follow-up interviews by phone in order to clarify or elaborate on an issue brought up in the individual interview.

All tapes, field notes, and transcripts will be destroyed once the entire project is completed.

It is emphasized that informants may withdraw from the investigation at any time. In the event an informant withdraws all data pertaining to his or her involvement will be destroyed.

APPENDIX E

Gender Issues in Perception of Disability in Relation to Sport and Physical Activity: A Pilot Study
Interview Question Framework

Opening statement:
You will recall that you participated in a focus group designed to explore some of the issues that men and women with disabilities share and face.

1. What issues are most important to you as a person with a disability interacting in today's society and culture?

Follow-Up Questions (if necessary)

1. Many of the participants said the Centre fulfils a social need for them. Is this true for you? In what way? (Are there social opportunities outside of the Centre environment?)

Listen to the following statement:

2. Being perceived as "normal" is important for social acceptance, i.e., by others or accepting the disability, i.e., self acceptance. This acceptance leads to "freedom". Is being disabled an acceptable condition? Where are you in accepting your disability? Freedom from what? From what does physical activity free you?

Listen to the following statement:

3. Without the support of others, living with a disability is said to be extremely difficult. Who are the others? In what way difficult?
4. In what way does involvement in competitive sport influence the way that you and others view disabilities?
5. Media, magazines and television (society) often present idealized body images and idealized images of men and women. How does this affect your view of yourself as a person with a disability? How might this affect your relationships with others?

Note: This is a sheet to remind the interviewer... of the topics approached in the focus group... it is not meant to be used verbatim.

APPENDIX F

Elite Disability Sport and the Female Athlete
Participant Information Sheet - Consent Form

Investigators: Lisa Olenik, M.Sc.
Contact Phone: (403) 492-7158 Rick Hansen Centre, University of Alberta

The purpose of this investigation is to examine the perceptions of women who do compete or have competed at the elite sport level. Using the context of participation of women in disability sport, it is hoped that this study will provide insight into the what initiates, sustains and deters the female athlete.

This study is one of three studies in a project on Women and Disability Sport. Each informant will only participate in one study. For the purposes of the present study, each informant will participate in one individual interview lasting approximately 1 to 2 hours. Each interview will consist of informal discussion relative to a question framework produced by the researcher.

It is emphasized that these sessions are designed to produce elaborate descriptions of the world in which the informants live and work. Therefore, there is no "right" line of questioning, nor correct answers. The direction that the discussion takes will be determined by the informant.

Descriptive statistics related to age, professional status, ethnicity, and lifestyle will be requested in order to provide a more accurate "picture" of the informants social world.

Once the interviews are finished, all data, including field notes, and descriptive statistics will be recorded (transcribed) and stored under lock and key. Data will be coded and identify of the informant will be kept confidential. Informants may be asked to participate in follow-up interviews by phone in order to clarify or elaborate on an issue brought up in the individual interview.

All tapes, field notes, and transcripts will be destroyed once the entire project is completed.

It is emphasized that informants may withdraw from the investigation at any time. In the event an informant withdraws all data pertaining to her involvement will be destroyed.

APPENDIX G

Elite Disability Sport and the Female Athlete
Consent Form

Investigators:	Lisa Olenik, M.Sc.	
Contact Phone:	(403) 492-7158	Rick Hansen Centre, University of Alberta

I ______________________________ hereby give my consent to be involved in an investigation entitled: "Elite Disability Sport and the Female Athlete".

I understand that my involvement will include participation in one individual interview with the researcher and subsequent phone interviews to follow-up or clarify any information produced in the first interview.

I understand that the individual interview will comprise informal discussion relative to my experiences within the social world of disability sport. I understand that the interview will last between 1 and 2 hours.

I understand that the individual interviews will be recorded and transcribed to preserve the accuracy of the data and will be viewed only by the principal investigators. I understand that at any point in the recording, I can request that the tape recorder be turned off.

I understand that the identity of the participants will be kept confidential by the investigators and all transcriptions will be coded and kept in a locked filing cabinet. I also understand that all tapes and transcripts will be destroyed at the completion of the project.

I understand that I may withdraw from the interview (investigation) at any time should I so desire and that I may terminate an interview by simple request at any time without prejudice to myself.

I have read the information form regarding this investigation and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Signed ______________________________ Date ____________________
(informant)

Signed ______________________________ Date ____________________
(principal investigator)

APPENDIX H

Elite Disability Sport and the Female Athlete Interview Question Framework

1. Please tell me about how you became involved in sport, what led to your involvement and who encouraged your entrance into sport.
2. Describe your initial sport or physical activity experiences.
   a. Physical Education?
   b. Organized Sport?
   c. Family?
3. Why did you enter elite competition? What led to that decision?
4. Describe your competitive experience?
5. What has sustained your level of involvement?
6. How do you cope with the pressures related to being an elite athlete?
7. How long do you intend to keep competing?
8. What would deter you from competition?
9. Describe your perfect life scenario?
10. How do you see yourself? (characteristics?)

Note: This is a framework only, and not indicative of the scope of discussion.

APPENDIX I

Women and Disability Sport: Perceptions and Approaches of Women Working in the Paralympic Movement
Participant Information Sheet - Consent Form

Investigators:	Lisa Olenik, M.Sc.	
Contact Phone:	(403) 492-7158	Rick Hansen Centre, University of Alberta

The purpose of this investigation is to examine the perceptions of women actively involved in research and administration at the elite sport level, using the context of participation of women in disability sport. It is hoped that this study will provide insight into the power structure which governs disability sport, by examining issues through the eyes of women actively involved in the policy and decision making.

This study is one of three studies in a project on Women and Disability Sport. Each informant will only participate in one study. For the purposes of the present study, each informant will participate in one individual interview lasting approximately 1 to 2 hours. Each interview will consist of informal discussion relative to a question framework produced by the researcher.

It is emphasized that these sessions are designed to produce elaborate descriptions of the world in which the informants live and work. Therefore, there is no "right" line of questioning, nor correct answers. The direction that the discussion takes will be determined by the informant.

Descriptive statistics related to age, professional status, ethnicity, and lifestyle will be requested in order to provide a more accurate "picture" of the informants social world.

Once the interviews are finished, all data, including field notes, and descriptive statistics will be recorded (transcribed) and stored under lock and key. Data will be coded and identify of the informant will be kept confidential. Informants may be asked to participate in follow-up interviews by phone in order to clarify or elaborate on an issue brought up in the individual interview.

All tapes, field notes, and transcripts will be destroyed once the entire project is completed.

It is emphasized that informants may withdraw from the investigation at any time. In the event an informant withdraws all data pertaining to her involvement will be destroyed.

APPENDIX J

Women and Disability Sport: Perceptions and Approaches of Women Working in the Paralympic Movement
Consent Form

Investigators:	Lisa Olenik, M.Sc.	
Contact Phone:	(403) 492-7158	Rick Hansen Centre, University of Alberta

I ________________________________ hereby give my consent to be involved in an investigation entitled: “Women and Disability Sport: Perceptions of Women Working in the Paralympic Movement”.

I understand that my involvement will include participation in one individual interview with the researcher and subsequent phone interviews to follow-up or clarify any information produced in the first interview.

I understand that the individual interview will comprise informal discussion relative to my experiences within the social world of disability sport. I understand that the interview will last between 1 and 2 hours.

I understand that the individual interviews will be recorded and transcribed to preserve the accuracy of the data and will be viewed only by the principal investigators. I understand that at any point in the recording, I can request that the tape recorder be turned off.

I understand that the identity of the participants will be kept confidential by the investigators and all transcriptions will be coded and kept in a locked filing cabinet. I also understand that all tapes and transcripts will be destroyed at the completion of the project.

I understand that I may withdraw from the interview (investigation) at any time should I so desire and that I may terminate an interview by simple request at any time without prejudice to myself.

I have read the information form regarding this investigation and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Signed ________________________________ Date ____________________
(informant)

Signed ________________________________ Date ____________________
(principal investigator)

APPENDIX K

Women and Disability Sport: Perceptions and Approaches of Women Working in the Paralympic Movement
Interview Question Framework

1. How did you get involved in sport? Participation? Career?
2. What has been your career path?
3. What life choices have you made along the way?
4. Describe your present position? How do you see your role?
5. Describe your personal philosophy in relation to disability sport?
6. What are your other influences? Family? Other Work?
7. What are your future plans?
8. What is your leadership style?
9. Is there a glass ceiling?
10. What is your mandate regarding equity?
11. Do you see the lack of female participants as problematic?
12. What would influence your to leave this field?
13. How would you describe yourself? Characteristics?
14. Where would you make changes in the sport system if possible?
15. What are your coping mechanisms?
16. How do you spend a typical day?

Note: These questions provided a framework only, and the discussion was not confined to these topics.